

# Anna of the Troubled Valley

A Tale of Rural Life

By JOSEPH WARWICK

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## FOREWORD

The term "first novel" attached to a work helps to cover its sins of omission and commission. The public is tolerant towards a first attempt in the literary field, which must of necessity lack the polish and stable construction of the works of more experienced writers.

"Anna of the Troubled Valley," as a first attempt, is no exception to the rule, and conscious of its shortcomings, its author claims the reader's indulgence.


The work was first begun as a holiday recreation some years ago, and has been continued and brought to a conclusion under many strange conditions and in many strange places.

The original title was "Headstrong Valley," but Mr. Fletcher having produced a novel under a similar title, a change has had to be made.

If, in reading, some one derives some measure of the pleasure the author has found in writing the work, he will feel himself amply rewarded.

J. W.

213 Burrin Avenue,  
West Kildonan,  
Man., Canada,  
Aug. 1st, 1923.



G L O S S A R Y  
of the dialect of the Avon Valley.

\* \* \*

Ay—yes.  
anywhen—anytime.  
aisy—easy.  
arl—all.  
a-follerin'—following.

bain't—isn't.  
b'st—is or are.  
b'ssn't—aren't.  
boughten—bought.  
be'ee—are you.  
bound—must.  
bide—wait.

cassn't—cannot.  
cussn't—couldn't.  
carn—corn.

dwan'ee—don't you.  
dussn't—doesn't.  
doan'ee—d<sup>o</sup>nt you.  
do'ee—will you (a request rather than a demand)  
do —added before a verb in almost every case.  
did—added before a verb altered as to tense.

en—words ending in in- such as "singen" etc.

feared—afraid.  
fairly—quite or very much.  
for— like a verb.

## GLOSSARY—Continued

girt—great.

gid—give.

g'wan—go on.

gleanen—gleaning.

huzzah!—hurrah!

haulen hwome—hauling home the harvest.

hassn't—haven't.

he—him; also used for the neuter gender.

hitch—tie or catch; to harness.

I did go—I went

I be—I am.

I—me in most cases.

I mind—I remember

maister—master.

marnin—morning—used for “good morning.”

'Mereky—America.

'Norten—Kingsnorten.

o'th—of the.

'pears—appears.

she'm; he'm—the 'm is an addition and used for “is.”

seed—saw.

singen—singing.

she—her; as in “along o' she” (with her.)

somewhen—sometime.

they—those.

thee—thou or you—cut short again to 'ec.

## GLOSSARY--Continued

theest--you have--you are.

th'self--yourself.

thik--that.

'tis--it is.

'twas--it was.

'twill--it will.

theer--there.

they'm--they are--they have.

'un--used as a pronoun of all genders.

us--we.

wheer--where; as in "wheer be g'wan" (where are you going.)

whicker--neigh.

we'm--we are; we have.

y-here--here.

you'm--you are; you have.

yon--yonder.

zoppy--silly--"girt zoppy" (great silly)



In the greenest growth of the maytime,  
I rode where the woods were wet;  
Between the dawn and the daytime  
The Spring was glad that we met.

I saw where the sun's hand pointed,  
I heard what the bird's note said,  
By the dawn and the dewfall anointed,  
You were queen by the gold on your head!

—A. C. Swinburne.



# Anna of the Troubled Valley

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## CHAPTER ONE.

"Anna, my child, what do you see?"

"Snow, father,—only snow!"

The girl left the window and crossed over to the man, stretched on a low bed in the corner of the room. He started impatiently as she made to smooth his pillows, bidding her in querulous tones, to resume her place at the window.

There she had sat for the better part of the day, her breath thawing a frosted pane, out of which could be dimly seen a wide sweep of prairie land. A trail led to the westward, but for days no living creature had broken it, and drifting snow had completely obliterated it from view. The girl's aching eyes gladly hailed the gathering gloom; night was fast approaching and with it a change from the vain task of searching the white horizon for some sign of life.

In common with most farms of the Canadian North-west, there was very little doing around New Dayrell in winter-time. As freeze-up approached, the hired men drifted into the towns or the lumber camps. Life at the isolated farm was bad enough in the summer-time, but to be cut off from the world with a man like Richard Boulton for five months—it was unthinkable. Not that this state of affairs worried the farmer. He would not have a stockman "loafing" around his place in winter, preferring to do what had to be done, entirely by himself.

Neighbors had warned him of the possible consequence of such "independence," of what might happen should fire, storm, sickness or accident visit the household of two, but the stubborn man in the conceit of his strength, paid them no heed, and he was now reaping the reward of such folly.

A week ago a sick horse had nervously lashed out at him as he had passed its stall; with customary stubbornness, he had made light of the injury to his chest, dragging his aching body about until utter exhaustion stretched him on the low bed.

A northern bound trapper had passed that way, sent it would seem, by heaven itself, for visitors to the little homestead in winter were extremely rare. He had promised to alter his course northward in order to call at the nearest neighbour's, the Havilands, and apprise them of the state of affairs at New Dayrell. In expectation of aid from this quarter, the girl had kept her weary watch, and now with relief she watched the little birch bluff about the house grow more indistinct with the approaching dusk. A wail echoed through the room, the wail of a sudden wind. Crisp, hard, snow-fragments beat against the wooden sides of the shack, whirled against the windows, and completely blotted every object from view. Against the sudden onslaught, the shack shivered. The man on the bed hacked as the icy air found its way in chilly currents through chinks in the woodwork.

A peculiar silence followed this first warning of the approaching storm—a silence broken only by the scarcely stifled sobs of the girl.

The man moved with a pitiful restlessness of the bondage man. A hollow voice called in the darkness.

"Anna: my child!"

The girl moved from her seat and leaned over the bed; her voice was full of patient tenderness.

"Yes; father?"

"Why do you cry?"

"Because—because—I'm afraid!"

"Of what?" he tried to laugh but the pain at his chest stifled the effort.

"I hardly know. Something—something of which I do not understand."

"Ha! ha!" his second attempt at a laugh was even more grotesque than the first, "My Anna afraid! Why Rab vowed you were the only one....who dared go near the black polled Angus....when it broke loose....last Dominion night!"

"Maybe; but I don't mean in that way, I am afraid of something I have no power against." Her voice sank to a whisper, "I am afraid you are going to leave me!"

"Shucks!" the man lied—knowing that he lied, too—"I am not badly hurt....a rib, maybe, smashed....but otherwise nothing to speak of...." His pauses for painful breath negatived his words. He continued: "I am young....thirty-nine is an absurd age to quit life.....neither here nor there....Besides, I've such a lot to do....I've no time; no time, my child, for dying."

She clung to him despairingly, her young arms twined protectingly about his powerful body.

"Ah! it would be cruel....cruel....to have to quit with so much work outstanding....God!.....God!....." he muttered appealingly.

The wind shook the house again and again. He seized a cup as a paroxysm of coughing overtook him. The girl hovered in terror over him, her eyes burning in the semi-darkness as they watched the thin red fluid trickle from his mouth.

"Blood! Blood!" she cried.

Instantly he stifled his coughing by a tremendous effort. His feeble finger pointed to the door. "Barns..... feed....." was all he could say, and reluctantly the girl turned away.

In the outer room she threw on a skin coat, cap and mittens, and as she opened the door a heap of drifted snow fell into the room. The man's quick ear detected the whine of the whirling wind.

"Poor Ned!" he groaned. "Make haste child! give 'Marshal Ney' the mash.....with a fourth part of the dope.....in the black bottle."

The girl passed into the darkness, keeping close to the guide rope her father had placed to link up the homestead with the outbuildings in bad weather. She cowered before the stinging nor-wester and had difficulty in keeping her feet what with wind and drifts. Arrived at the barns her capable hands saw to the wants of the patient stock, amid a great display of delighted lowing and whinnying and slapping of glossy necks.

She had scarcely crossed the threshold on her return when the stampings and shakings of the snow from her clothes were interrupted by the voice from the inner room, calling impatiently:

"Lights! Anna! Lights! we must keep up lights all night. Ned will need all the help.....we can give him..... if he is on the open.....tonight!"

Anna hung kerosene lamps at each window. She then flung wide the stove door and fed the fire from a pile of logs nearby. As the red glare fell upon her, the man's bloodshot eyes jealously watched. A wealth of unruly hair tumbled over her shoulders in a cascade of molten gold; her bright young countenance was lit by the soft light of two adorable grey eyes; she carried herself with an easy, natural grace, and strong and

supple of limb, the great outdoors very clearly claimed her among its children. Her clothes were rough but tidy, and the man watched with satisfaction that when she had finished her tasks she took off the gauntlet gloves, revealing a pair of snowy, capable hands that would have graced any lady in the land.

Her present anxiety notwithstanding, Anna Boulton, the child, would have pleased the most fastidious observer of her appearance. She indeed bade fair to develop into a woman of great charm.

"Come, my child!" said the man, "Come and rest!.....surely someone will be here.....soon!"

"It is unlikely. The trapper would not reach Haviland's until Tuesday at the earliest, and now it is but Thursday."

"At that, Ned should be here by now.....with his roans and a cutter he could make the journey in thirty hours.....the going has been good until an hour ago."

He drew her close to him as she knelt by the bed, and tired with her labors, the girl slept in the arch of his arm.

'Twas a great subject for an artist. The oil lamps threw a lurid glare upon the palor of the man's unshorn face, the light glinted among the luxurious golden strands of the child's head, pillowed on his arm. In sunken sockets his eyes burned fiercely defiant as though challenging the grim hovering spectre to do its worst—and separate them.

An hour passed. Outside the storm raged ceaselessly. He laid the girl carefully on the bed as another coughing fit threatened him. He tried to stifle the sound, his throat choking, his face purpling, with the effort. Blood oozed from his nose and mouth as he sank back exhausted.

The blizzard grew with the night and pounded the shack from every angle. 'Twas well Richard Boulton had built strongly. And as he listened to the sullen roar the man's brain began to play him tricks, unhinged as it was by physical and mental torment. He fancied familiar voices called him over the lapse of years; familiar forms fitted in the lamplight to be displaced by vague creatures that crowded around his bed and attempted to tear the sleeping child from his protection.

His arms shot out wildly to beat them off, through the mist that enveloped his eyes he fancied they bore the child from the chamber, and springing from the bed he followed in pursuit. The outer door was barred, but it did not resist his frantic battering, and flinging on some garments through sheer force of habit, he passed into the storm outside.

A whirling mass of snow greeted him. Hell's shrieking legions seemed to be loosed and battling with all a madman's strength he fought the elements for what seemed an interminable period, but what in reality was only a few brief moments. Blinded and breathless he lost his foothold, but struggling to his feet he plunged anew into the teeth of the storm. A cold stiffness seized his limbs, and with it came some return of his normal self. With a super-human effort he flung himself at the icy wall that seemed to have sprung up around him. His lurch landed him in the snow, and he could not rise. He realized his danger as a peculiar drowsiness overtook him. He tried to combat it, but could not, and the snow ere long was drifting over his lifeless form.



## CHAPTER TWO

The June day had been insufferably hot. The sun had beaten down upon the Avon valley since early morning, but now a breeze had sprung up, stirring the leaves into a gentle murmur. The long twilight was drawing to a close as the Reverend Robert Haviland seated himself at the open French window of his Rectory. The scent of the garden beyond floated fragrantly on the breeze as he watched the purple mists about the distant hills sober to a dull grey.

Tall and spare, with a shapely head crowned by its mass of black hair that greyed slightly at the temples, a quiet dignity rested upon the cleric. Pale and refined, much lined by suffering, his features betokened a man much given to study and to the contemplation of the divine mysteries. His blue eyes were sad and his every movement fraught with the consciousness of physical limitations. In age he was still young—forty, or maybe, younger.

His fingers toyed with the official form of a telegram—a missive he had expected for years, but which had only arrived the previous day.

Richard Boulton's daughter had crossed the ocean to settle in the land of her fathers, and was on her way to claim her inheritance; and he told himself, he would be required to give an account of his stewardship of the properties left in his care by the prairie farmer. Their friendship had dated from school days. Then the impulsive Richard Boulton had greatly depended on the patient and considered judgment of his friend. At an early age he had come into the family inheritance, Combe Dayrell Manor, contracted an hasty marriage, suffered the loss of his wife, and involved himself into



financial difficulties. At this low ebb in the affairs of his fortunes, Boulton had migrated to the colonies, leaving what remained of his estates in Haviland's hands.

His trusteeship had been prolonged seventeen years, and it was with a feeling of relief that he reflected the cares would pass from his hands with the advent of the daughter of the house, the last of the historical line of Boultons.

The cleric was early at Kingsnorton station on the morrow. The down line from London branched higher up at Wildingham Junction; and the connecting trains were not always run to schedule. However the deferent porters assured him the train would be in to time, and as he paced the platform he recalled the advice of an old schoolmaster "When looking for something, the first essential is to get a fixed idea of what that something looks like." The old logician's precept did not serve him very happily. He had not the slightest idea of what Anna looked like—he had neither photograph nor description to aid him.

And as he ruminated, the train came puffing and screaming around the bend in the line, drawing up slowly alongside the platform.

A crowd of people emerged from the train, porters trundled luggage about, whistles blew, gongs rang, and in the confusion the cleric dodged hither and thither in utter bewilderment. Suddenly a woman's voice accosted him:

"Pardon me; but are you Mr. Haviland?"

He swung around on his heel. An elegantly attired young woman held out her hand, "I am Miss Boulton—you got my wire?"

"Yes; yes," he stammered, "I am very glad you have come."

He took her hand, his eye meanwhile travelling the length of her figure. His confused smile betrayed nothing. The fair promise of beauty in the child we saw at New Dayrell had been amply fulfilled, for in the five years that had separated these two incidents, Anna had developed into a strikingly handsome woman. Clad in a plain navy costume, a knot of cornflowers at the waist matched the trimmings of her hat, whilst snowy-white lace at her wrists and throat lent a touch of refined sweetness to her appearance.

A sparkle of fun crept into her fine eyes at his embarrassment.

"It was too bad of me not to send something to enable you to identify me, because I sure must have altered somewhat since last you saw me."

Haviland laughed.

"You were a tiny enough thing then—just a pink bundle of troubled humanity. How could I expect to see such a——"

He did not finish his sentence but his glance at her attire betrayed his unspoken word.

"It was all the fault of your wonderful London. Those long lines of stores on Oxford Street intrigued me into parting with some good Canadian dollars—I should have been scarcely feminine, had I been able to resist. Prior to that I believe I had a decided wild and woolly flavour about me. However, should I wish to revert back to type the means is in my grip."

"I suppose you are glad the journey's over. Are you very tired?"

"Not at all. I had a good night after the 'busses had quitted the streets. Up to then the racket would have wakened old Judge Knyaston, who after a lifetime of hearing disputes in the speedy court, entered the Fed-

eral Parliament to get proper rest. It always took several ushers to rouse him when the House rose."

"I do not know what or if you have made any plans. But I have a conveyance outside. Would you care to go over to Combe Dayrell today?"

"Just as you think fit. I am unreservedly in your hands."

Together they left the station and began the journey through the little market town, in the high gig.

"I forgot to give you a message from Uncle Ned," she said, "he enjoined me to say that a church is being built at his place, Havilands, and he sure would like a Haviland to become its first minister."

"I am afraid I should fit very ill in the scheme of things on the prairie," he replied.

"Yes; it is a hard life—one that a person must be born to, unless he is endowed with a constitution such as your brother has. He is reputed to be the strongest man in an area a thousand miles square."

"Is he happy out there; he complains in his letters of having scarcely time to breathe and eat."

"Maybe; but his heart is in his farm. They are taking the railroad to it, and there is every promise of a considerable township springing up around Havilands."

"And New Dayrell. You have disposed of your interest there?"

"Yes; it was apparently father's wish. Besides it was too outlandish. We never could get good farm hands to settle there as it was three days driving to the railhead. Why father chose such a place I cannot imagine. Its outlandishness contributed to his death, for we were alone when the accident happened. Uncle Ned arrived the night father died, and nearly perished himself in the blizzard that was raging."

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She bent her head at the tragic memory. Her eyes moistened the long lashes that fell before the man's sympathetic glance.

"Ned wrote me all about it!" he murmured, "Your father and I were friends."

"I know." He expressed the wish that I come to you as soon as things were cleaned up. I feel guilty at delaying my coming so long—but everyone at Havilands was so kind—they really spoilt me between them."

They had now emerged from the town, Anna gazed at the countryside. In some fields the first crop of hay was being taken, whilst others were vividly green with young wheat or the fresh grass of pasture. The small hedged fields particularly attracted her attention, and her companion read her inquiring glances. "I suppose you farm on a different scale on the prairie?"

"Yes a larger scale altogether. I guess we could lose your largest farm in Uncle Ned's chicken run," she laughed, "although with all the year in which to cultivate your land you should beat us in the matter of quality. You see all our crop raising is crammed into a few short months, and quality has necessarily got to give way to quantity."

"You will have the opportunity of putting into practice any knowledge of farming you may have, as I have kept some of your land constantly under cultivation and the grass lands can be turned over to the plough this autumn, should you wish it. I am afraid I am but an indifferent business man and have not exploited your estate as I might have done. My aim has been to make a portion of the estate yield sufficient income to pay off charges and expenses against the whole, as well as to pay off some mortgages that your father assumed some years ago. My limited knowledge of farming curbed any enterprise I might have cherished, and to call in



a manager or bailiff would not have pleased your father. I often suggested such a course to him, but his reply was that he was satisfied with my conduct of his affairs here, and so the matter rested."

"And the Manor House; does anyone live there?"

He shook his rein meditatively before replying.

"Oh! no; the place has not been occupied since your father left. I had suggested that he rented it, but he would not hear of anyone but a Boulton living there. The greater part of the furniture was sold at his departure, and after trying in vain to get a caretaker for the place, I have had to allow it to take care of itself. I trust you will not be disappointed in it."

Anna reflected.

"When do you think the place can be made habitable?" she asked.

"Six months at the very least. A mason has not touched the walls for a hundred years!"

"I have heard it is an historical place. Do tell me something about it."

"Yes; it is one of the most ancient houses in the country. Your family has held it in an unbroken line since Edward VI's reign, and among the many legends popular superstition attached to the Manor was one concerning the fire in the Great hall. It was said this had never been allowed to go out since the house was built, and that when it did go out the lineal continuity would break. This fire has been out many years now, and here we have you back to give the lie to the legend."

"And where can I stay until the place is put into shape?"

"If you cared to accept the modest hospitality of my Rectory House, I would indeed feel honored."

"But are you sure I shall not be a hindrance to you in the discharge of your clerical duties?"

"They are not so onerous as apparently you imagine. Do not worry on that score."

"Very well. I appreciate your kindness very much."

They turned into a by-lane to begin the long ascent of a winding hilly road.

"I am taking you somewhat out of your direct path," he explained, as I cannot resist the temptation to show you some of the most beautiful scenery in the country."

"Ned has often tried to respond to my inquiries by describing the beauties of the Avon Valley, but Ned, as you know, sees such things as scenery as through a glass darkly, and left me little the wiser. Now if I had asked him for pointers on a Holstein or a Percheron——."

"I know! Ned is a materialist—but a very human materialist withal."

He shook the reins at the slackening mare, and she finished the hill at a trot. And while the road lingered on the hill's crest, he drew rein and waited for the girl to take her fill of the glorious panorama of the valley beyond that spread itself, as it were, at their feet. Their road skirted the edge of the hill for some distance and dipping sharply, wound serpent-like mile after mile, ever descending, until it ran parallel with the broad waters of the Western Avon threading lazily through the sun-drenched valley. On, on, road and river ran past hamlet and village, past mansion and farmstead; now hidden by fields of waving grass, now skirting green pasture lands, until they both became swallowed up in distance and mist.

On either side of the valley slopes, were villages clustering about ancient churches, and the ruins of an old monastery showed through their sentinel trees. The glorious medley of colour rivalled some magic carpet of an Arabian Knight story.

When Haviland turned to his charge she was quietly weeping. The thought of what it must have cost her father to leave such scenes for the bleak prairie; of how his heart must have hungered for a sight of this beautiful valley, this home of his ancestors, overwhelmed her.

"The Manor," she asked, "Where is it?"

He pointed to beyond where the river was bridged at Queckett village, a group of tall poplars hid the Manor House. A gable was just discernable almost white in the vivid sunlight.

As they sped swiftly towards the house, Anna drew deep breaths of pure air. This was home! The smell of it was already in her nostrils; every object seemed familiar and to nod her a greeting.

And the mare raced on—over Queckett bridge, through Coombe Dayrell village, on to the bridle road and into the carriage drive of Coombe Dayrell Manor, coming to a standstill before the door of—Home!

Haviland alighted, but Anna had sprung to the ground ere he could offer her his hand. For a moment she stood still—awed by the cold grandeur of the deserted house. The likeness of old houses to human hearts has often been instanced; each with a life of its own, full of sweet and sad reminiscences, but to judge by the outward appearance of Coombe Dayrell Manor, the sad far outweighed the sweet. It was a Tudor Mansion of considerable proportions, and in the great walls time and neglect had implanted their clawing fingers in gaping fissures and had crumbled the stonework about the deep bays. The panes of the mullioned windows were cracked or broken, gaps appeared about the chimney clusters, and a peculiarly wrought corbel that supported an oriel window in the entrance porch overhung precariously. Along the Eastern side, opposite the un-



kempt lawn, the balustrades and alcoves of the raised terrace had tumbled completely and the stone steps had that "anyhow" fashion that suggests the depredation of an earthquake.

The once

".....well rolled walks,

with curvature of slow and easy sweep."

had long ago lost their beauty, and were scattered with the debris of broken masonry.

The interior proved equally cheerless.

"One understands the necessity of perpetual fires," said Anna, as they crossed the chilly hall.

With a clouded brow she investigated the dark evil-smelling rooms where the dust hid the beauty of the precious paneling and fireplaces.

Haviland commenced the ascent of the staircase.

"I would rather not go," said Anna, "I have seen enough."

In silence they returned to the trap.

"Well?" said Haviland, interrogatively, as he assisted her into the vehicle.

"I am glad you did not lead me to expect anything else," she replied, "of course I cannot be expected to live in such a place. How soon can we put it on the market—that is, if it is marketable?"

"You would have considerable difficulty in disposing of the Manor," he answered, "it is the subject of so many superstitions." After a pause he added coldly, "I am sorry the thought of living there is repugnant to you. Were you acquainted with the sacrifices your forbears have made for the place, you would probably decide that, being no better than they, your inheritance was not a thing you could lightly barter in a market place. I shall make it my immediate business to put you in possession of its whole history, and if you then adhere to

your present opinion, it will be perhaps as well that the mansion passes into other hands."

Anna did not mistake his tone.

"Pardon me," she said, "if I seem ungrateful, or maybe, do not sufficiently honor the traditions of my people. How could I be expected to see the matter in its right perspective, when such things are not considered in my Western home. There the past and its influences enters but sparsely into a man's life; what he is, and is to become, only matters."

"I know; your father once wrote me of the lack of reverence in the Canadian people. He complained of their commercialism and cited an instance where a church congregation decided to build a larger church and to offer the old building for sale. A furniture merchant purchased it and stuck his sign on a flag affixed to the steeple."

"That is no uncommon occurrence all through the West. But, please, be patient with me. I have a difficult period before me, in which I must adjust my new world ideas to suit the old. May I look to you for help?"

"Of course you may. I suppose I am a crusty old fogey. But old traditions and associations are to me sacred things. I suppose, as in your case, it is a matter of atmosphere—how one is brought up."

"Yes; but do not call yourself a fogey. You are neither that, nor old. I like you and am sure we shall agree; and if it is the right thing for me to live at the Manor, I will do so. But do you think the place can be made habitable?"

"Oh; yes; with judicious handling the fine old features of the original building can be retained, alongside of modern conveniences."

"But it will cost a great deal to put it into shape, I suppose? And the upkeep; will that not be considerable?"

"One day I will go into these matters thoroughly with you. I believe you can make the place not only self-supporting but to yield a modest income. The initial outlay will be heavy, but it will be justified. I have known the time when Combe Dayrell Manor counted its farm servants by the score, and there is no reason why the ancient house should not experience a revival of fortune with your coming. The countryside, I hope, will be enriched by the rehabilitation of the Manor, and I am sure, by your presence among us."

Anna turned to him gratefully.

"That is a pretty welcome speech which I shall endeavor to justify," she said.

## CHAPTER THREE

Just beyond the hamlet of Queckett the Rectory lay. Beyond the garden, the long sweep of the Northern Valley slopes spread up to a bright skyline. The Rectory was a quiet structure of grey stone, clematis clad, and surrounded by a brilliant garden of summer flowers. The pathways were edged with phlox, snapdragon and stocks of gay coloring and heavy scent; carnations and dahlias spread themselves in vivid pools, and roses bloomed in a profusion of colorful tones.

Pope must have had some such garden in mind when he wrote:—

"Where opening roses breathing sweets diffuse,  
And soft carnations shower their balmy dews;  
Where lillies smile in virgin robes of white,  
The thin undress of superficial light.  
And varied tulips show so dazzling gay,  
Blushing in bright diversities of day."

Anna surveyed the scene enraptured, "It was an error of diplomacy to invite me here," she laughed. "If the interior is half as pleasing I am likely to overstay my welcome."

Haviland swung open the French doors for her to pass inside. A tall gaunt woman embraced her. It was Elspeth, her late father's housekeeper, whom Haviland had once again pressed into the service of a Boulton. Between her tears the faithful creature welcomed Anna, recounting the while events that had taken place at her birth and subsequently. Although she chattered much, there was a respect—almost a reverence—in the housekeeper's manner towards Anna, and hovering about her as though the girl were a crown jewel in her keeping, she saw to her every need.

The bedroom set apart for her, Anna found to be a

pretty apartment with a sunny outlook across the meadows to Combe Dayrell. A little oak bed, white sheeted and smelling delicately of lavender, stood in a recess over which sloped the rafters of the roof. The wide-flung casements admitted the incense of a myriad sweetly smelling flowers, but as she sat at the small table near the window, the girl felt very sad. Everything was so beautiful, so mellowed by time, so pleasant and so restful. The birds flitted from branch to branch, twittering incessantly and hopping unafraid near a drowsy white cat—a sleek sun-worshipper that lay in ecstasy on the chequered lawn. But she thought of the tumbledown shack on the blistering prairie, the straggling homesteads, the crude farm buildings. She wondered what masterly platitude was falling from rough Ned Havilands' lips at that moment; of how Jess and the head stockman had progressed in their courtship; as to whether the Clyde foal had recovered from his cracked heel, and of a multitude of trifling things that formerly had been as important to her as was breath to her body. She was about to forsake them, and to change her mode of life entirely. The conversation with Haviland shewed her that. The beauty of her surroundings heightened her growing rebellion; she was young and strong, used to a life of intense activity; she would not submit to sit demurely in a drawing room, and fade like some potted flower.

Her ears were assailed by familiar sounds—the thud of hoofs on the burning plain; the tramp of rushing cattle; the crack of stock whips; and the cheery voices of well tried friends—and they set her longing for the old life—the life of the open prairie.

With a few swift movements she freed herself from the tyranny of her fashionable garments; they had suddenly become distasteful to her. She released the rich

coils of her hair, tumbling them over her bare shoulders in rich profusion.

A washing basin was filled with cold, spring water and plunging her face into its crystal depths, the roses mounted to her cheeks, and the sensation of freshness helped dispel the rebellion within her. After all she told herself, she would try to adapt herself to her surroundings. Elspeth, she was sure, would help her, and despite his hasty admonition of her, Haviland she felt could be trusted to carry out his promise to help her.

She was not so sure that she liked Haviland as well as his brother Ned. The two men were as different as could be. But she felt sure, Robert shared his brother's uprightness and integrity of character. His quiet blue eyes inspired trust, his courtesy spoke of solicitude for the welfare of others; the clearness of his brow spoke of the nobility of his thoughts, and she was sure that Ned's reference to his brother Robert as being a "white man"—the highest appellation he knew—was justified.

Absorbed in these and like speculations she did not hear the gong that had sounded twice to summon her to the mid-day meal. At length Elspeth appeared, and helping her new mistress into a muslin dress, preceded her to the dining room where Haviland was patiently awaiting her.

He instantly advanced at her entry, and apologized for the modesty of his domestic arrangements.

"The stipend I receive decides the number of servants I may employ. Elspeth 'keeps' house whilst Anthony, who has been with me more years than I care to remember, acts as butler, groom, gardener and in a host of other capacities."

The meal was substantial and well cooked. Anna was hungry after her journey and although he ate but sparingly himself, the Rector watched his guest's

enjoyment of the viands with great satisfaction.

When Anthony placed the coffee on the table, Haviland ventured to enquire would she be comfortable.

"Quite," she answered with enthusiasm, "I must confess to feeling a little doubtful at first, but everything is so beautiful and so full of charm, that I could not fail to be otherwise, I think. It is surely a happy disposition of Providence to place a man of the temperament I should imagine you to be, in such a spot. You must be very happy here."

"Happiness is an elusive quality. Unconsciously you liken me to the king in the fable who vainly sought it by surrounding himself with beautiful objects. Like him, I find that personal comfort and enjoyment may promote a measure of contentment—but happiness never."

"I have heard that true happiness consists in making others happy. Is that what the king did?"

No; he ordered the beautiful objects to be destroyed, and declared happiness never could be found in this life. Then one day he chanced to be strolling in the country, and seeing a peasant woman feeding her large family, stopped to commiserate with her on its huge proportions. But the woman answered him indignantly that she was perfectly happy in the midst of her family.

The King then hastened back to court announcing that he had found the secret of perfect happiness, and demanding to be surrounded by young children."

"And then—?" asked Anna smiling.

"The fable goes no further. Doubtless the King was shut up in a madhouse. There was a moral to it somewhere, but I have lost it."

And so they idled away an hour—a pleasant, restful hour such as the girl had scarcely known before. Her companion was in a genial mood, and she felt a pang

of regret when the Rector rose from the table and moved over to the door.

"And now," he said, "you may wish to see something of your farm. We have a good acreage under cultivation, but latterly we have been handicapped by a shortage of labour. More and more men drift every year into Kingsnorton and the situation is becoming quite acute.

"Maybe; I can help," she replied.

Haviland took up her shapely hands between his own palms. He shook his head negatively.

"But why not?" she insisted, "I have graduated in a good school; maybe, I could do a day's work alongside some men. Ned used to credit me with as much back home. I can pitch hay, stook corn, tend stock, bust a broncho or herd cattle. And if any chores need to be done, why what's wrong with giving me a chance?"

The man opened his eyes in wide surprise. The girl looked so eager, so capable withal, that he could not but believe in her, and yet she seemed so different. How had she escaped the coarsening inseparable from labour?

"Tell me," he said, "something of your upbringing, of your education, and of your life."

"There is not much to tell. I guess you are acquainted with my early history; of my education I can only tell you that my father tutored me up to his death; afterwards I graduated at the Provincial College of Manitoba; took two summer terms at an Agricultural College, and after that, I'm afraid I was allowed to run wild. However I have made it my business to keep in touch with things in general, and as Ned was acquainted with the best families in Saskatchewan and Alberta, I have never failed to avail myself of the advantages of mixing with them and incidently learning something from them. I suppose you will think my education very haphazard,



but I assure you it has been quite comprehensive, if not eminently practical. Of my life I can say little. It has been uneventful, save for the tragic event of the loss of my father. Had I remained a nobody instead of coming here to be a somebody, I suppose I should have married some prairie farmer, and lived happy ever afterwards."

Together, they stepped into the sunshine of the June afternoon, and leaving the highroad, entered a bridle path. Through grassy meadows, fields of fragrant beans, by full foliaged woods, down leaf-shaded lanes, musical with the hum of insects and the twitter of sparrows, past the noisy sun-flecked brook, lay the path. Everything seemed happy and glad, and to welcome her home. The birds sang in her honour, the buttercups and meadow-sweet lifted their heads to kiss the hem of her skirt as she passed by; the sick horse came to the gate to rub its nose against her shoulder in greeting; the labourers paused in their tasks to pull a forelock; even the growing grain seemed to nod and whisper a welcome.

And through it all rang in her heart the joyous words—"Home—Home at last!"

Certainly not the dilapidated old house they were now bound for,—but somewhere bright and cheerful; somewhere in which her host had a part. The walk had had the effect of bringing them together. The girl confided in him her girlish secrets and quite oblivious of the approach of a horseman, they wandered on.

As the horseman passed he turned in his saddle and boldly scrutinized Anna. He swept his hat from his head and bowed and passed on.

Robert Haviland's stiff responding nod together with the disdainful smile of the horseman informed her that the Rector had an enemy.

## CHAPTER FOUR

The Howarths had always been an unpopular family in the Avon Valley. The governing class hated them for their power; the labourers for the manner in which they exploited it.

Their history was linked up with the history of the villagers' struggle for freedom through the ages—aye, from Cade to Joseph Arch,— and in the protracted struggle their part was always that of the oppressor—, overbearing, callous, unyielding. They clung to the dogma of serf and vassal to the last, and old, abominable orders they relinquished but tardily, and always with a bad grace and grudgingly. One of their number had earned national notoriety by his part in the atrocious conviction and transportation of labourers in 1834 that aroused such indignation among the artisans of the large towns.

Again 40 years later, during the Arch riots, another Howarth, father of the present head of the house, had supplanted the black family record, by a persistent persecution of those who had attempted to join in the forward movement, and had displayed great cruelty in suppressing disturbances on his estates. Towards the close of his life, the old man had repented somewhat of his harshness, and instituted a series of reforms. A typical instance was the old system of truck or payment for labour partly in kind instead of wholly in money. Although an act of Parliament had been passed as long ago as 1831, making this illegal, certain employers ignored it without molestation from the authorities. This old system of truck he abolished, but when he had died, his son, the present head, nicknamed by the

countryside "Wicked Jack," re-instituted it along with other tyrannies his father had swept away.

John Howarth had inherited great worldly possessions. Moreover he had added to them by means of hard work and shrewd management. And so his estates spread far and wide through the district. In his business dealings, Howarth had proven himself unscrupulous and exacting with rich and poor alike. When a pound of flesh was his legal portion, he demanded sixteen ounces and saw that he got it, cost the other party what it may. But with all his harshness, Howarth had conferred a mild boon on the district. For years it had been known that a durable grey stone, similar in quality and colour to Bath stone, was present in the soil in large quantities. Until he had begun quarrying operations at Openmarsh, nobody had had the enterprise to turn it into a commercial product, and now scores of quarries had been established all through the county, providing regular employment for a considerable number of hands. His own quarries at Openmarsh were already famous throughout the land, and in the role of quarryowner, he was best known.

Isolated from human sympathy, almost deprived of human contact, the man became more sullen and more hard than he might otherwise have been. Abhorring sentiment he pursued his interests seeking nothing that did not advance them.

As he reins in his horse at the bend of the road and dismounts we have the opportunity of seeing what manner of man he is. Powerfully built, of great height and breadth, forty years or more of age, his appearance was striking. The steady gaze of the deep set eyes, the firm mouth under the prominent nose told of a strength of will in keeping with his physical proportions. Determination was writ on the brow; his face was lined,

but the weathering of storms may have implanted them there. There was nothing about him to indicate the selfish, self-centered disposition with which he was credited. He looked altogether too manly and strong; which shows that nature does sometimes err in the outward portrayal of a man's inner self.

Turning at the bend, Howarth watched the figures of Anna and the Rector disappear in the direction of the Manor. Meditatively he watched his horse cropping the short grass by the wayside. For some minutes he remained thus, and then, throwing himself astride, he rode off.

The Howarths and the Boultons were the two oldest families in the neighborhood and between them for many years had existed an astonishing state of affairs. In the old days the families had been so violently at variance that the Kings had sent troops to keep order; but of late years the feud had taken a much milder form, and had consisted of sundry acts of hostility or annoyance, such as the burning of straw stacks, the poisoning of cattle, and the throwing down of encroaching fencing. The hand of friendship had never been extended between members of the two houses, and each boasted that no member of the opposite house had crossed its threshold. The cause of the hostility centered around the ownership of the Manor and the consequent possession of the Manorial rights. These did not amount to anything in these days, but formerly they were considerable and much coveted in consequence. The Manor, itself, could be traced back to Edward the Confessor, for the charter by which he dedicated Bratton in Wiltshire to Christ and St. Peter, in the Abbey of Glastonbury, he also gave one hide to *Ombe*. At the Domesday survey the Manor was held by William Dayrell, who bestowed it upon the Monks of Grestein in Normandy.

On the suppression of the foreign monasteries the Howarths obtained possession, but only for a short time, as the name of Geoffrey Boulton appears as having built the present structure after the original building had been destroyed by fire in Edward III's reign. How he came to so suddenly oust the Howarths, has always remained a mystery, but the fact remained, that since Geoffrey, the place had been held by the Boultons in an unbroken line.

Through all these centuries the Howarths had strived to regain possession of the Manor. In every way they endeavored to impoverish their rivals and to annoy them at every conceivable opportunity. The Boultons had not taken these attentions lying down, and so a condition of friction had constantly been engendered, and the old wounds had never been allowed to heal.

Reckless Richard Boulton had left the Manor seventeen years previously. From fragmentary gossip Howarth knew that the child he took abroad with him was expected home about now. Could that girl he had passed higher up the road be the Boulton whose coming he had awaited all these years? His blood fired at the thought that such a chit of a girl with her fine eyes and golden hair should return to remind him that the Boulton line was still unbroken. His teeth bared in anger as he recollected how Robert Haviland had proved a stumbling block to his efforts to get control of the mortgages with which Richard Boulton had encumbered his estates. Instinctively he felt the turn of the tide had been reached in the fortunes of the rival family; and he knew that if his fears were correct, gone was all chance of realizing the family ambition in his lifetime.

In a bad temper he dismounted at an inn that stood back from the road at the entrance to Combe Dayrell village. The "Cardinal Wolsey" had been an hostelry

of some importance but it was now long past its palmy days. A large wooden signpost displaying a flamboyant device of a disagreeable-looking old fellow in a red nightcap straddling a yellow carpet stood near the road. For the edification of the less learned, the village Titian had inscribed in gilt lettering the legend:

"The Cardinal Wolsey

On the Field of the Cloth of Gold."

The building was large and rambling, with two deep bays flanking the centre porch. It would have been picturesque enough, despite its architectural shortcomings, had not some vandal been amusing himself daubing bright green paint on the timbered front.

As he strode into the yard Howarth called for the hostler. A withered vinegary individual responded, shuffling across the yard as fast as his ancient legs would take him. But he did not move fast enough for the quarryowner.

"Damn you!" said the latter. "Do you think I have all day to wait!"

The mare too seemed to partake of her master's mood, for when the hostler attempted to take her head, she bared her teeth viciously and grabbed at his arm.

"Steady there; Vixen!" roared her owner, emphasising the command with a blow of his fist. The mare was instantly quelled and submitted to the hostler's attention without further trouble.

In the Inn parlour Howarth seated himself at a table. A shuffle of heavy feet announced the landlord, who, recognizing the visitor and his wants shuffled off again behind the bar. His voice was heard giving directions for the mixing of drinks, and back again he shuffled.

"Why don't you rid yourself of that fool hostler, Mallard?" grumbled the quarryowner as the landlord

assumed a seat opposite his own, "He's too feeble to tie up a horse; I had to knock my mare senseless before he dare go near her!"

The innkeeper's big face took on a sour expression. His chubby fist pounded the table gently. A big sigh heaved from his big body. It was plain he was annoyed at the quarryowner's presence

"Thik mare o' yourn be a vicious beast, Maister," he said "an' Spider Parkes he be suitable for I; a younger man 'ud ask waiges and keep—and they I can't afford! 'Sides; wheer be Spider a-goin' if I cast un adrift?"

"There's many a better man in the poorhouse."

"Ay;" responded Mallard; adding slyly: "Thee should know!"

Howarth glared at the taunter, but the arrival of the hostess with a glass of spirits diverted his attention.

She was a small woman who accepted without question the cruel fate that decided she must wash, scour, cook, and serve liquor the while her husband grew fat watching her work her fingers to the bone. The only liquor he drew was for his own consumption.

Mistress Mallard dropped her visitor a neat curtesy, She had been trained that way by landlord-scared parents and it came naturally to her.

"Three Star and Soda, sir" she chirped.

"No soda, mistress, please; I always drink neat."

The innkeeper turned savagely upon his wife. Thee'st allus making mistakes!" he complained, "'twould be marvellous if thee'st fill an order right! Maister Howarth have used this house long enough now for thee to know his wants. No; thee'st no need for to tak' it back—'twill do for I—though it do hurt me sorely for to gulp thik soda muck! Get along woman! Maister here have work to do if thee hassn't!"

The woman pattered off and Mallard eyed the spirits solemnly.

"'Tis an ill wind that blows nobody good, eh?" remarked Howarth with a wink.

"'Tis precious little good 'twill do I. 'Twill pain me like enough—whisky never do sit well on this stummick o' mine!"

"Why drink it then?"

"Ah! thee may well ask that! 'Twould pain I more to throw 'un away—waste do hurt I sorely!"

He tried to roll a cold eye at the offending liquor, but the sparkle of anticipation that lighted the dull orb was deadened by apprehension as Howarth leaning over the table, grasped the glass.

A waggoner lounged at the door and calling to him the quarryowner bade him drink the spirits. Surprise and satisfaction struggled for supremacy in the man's face as he handed back the emptied glass.

"Both your stomach and your conscience owe me thanks," said Howarth to the crestfallen innkeeper.

Mallard scowled furiously; had he dared he would have dashed the new glass of spirits from the quarryowner's fingers as he held it tauntingly to the light.

"Pretty prosperous business, the licensed trade, these days, eh, Mallard?" he asked.

"There be little prosperity in giddin Three Star to wagoners!"

"Come stop grumbling for once. What I mean is that business must be good now that the 'Ram' at Openmarsh is closed?"

"We do get precious little Openmarsh trade here. They do go into the town."

"Not all of them. I saw Dawkins with Jew Boy Jo leave here, last night. How long has the gipsy been out of gaol?"



"I dunno! His time warnt to be up till August, for 'twas ploughing time he did get his six calendars."

"Take a warning from me, and do not encourage such characters around your house. Your new mistress may not approve of it."

"Begging your pardon, sir. Not my mistress, this y-here property be freehold now and held in perpetuity for Tobias Mallard, his heirs and assigns. No one be my mistress."

"Anyway the mistress of Combe Dayrell Manor—Dick Boulton's daughter".

"Can it be possible? I've heerd tell she'm expected every day up at Queckett.. Then 'tis true the Manor is to be opened again?"

Howarth did not reply. He noted the satisfaction in the other's countenance and did not desire to add to it by displaying his own chagrin.

Mistress Mallard had meantime crossed over to the door and her exclamation brought the two men to the door.

"'Tis Parson Haviland and the new mistress! Lord! what a fine creature she be!" she exclaimed.

The couple were passing up the pathway at the beckoning of the innkeeper and as they approached, Howarth vaulted over the bar and made his escape at the rear. He had the reputation of never allowing himself to be caught by surprise, and even at the expense of the loss of a little dignity he determined to maintain it.

## CHAPTER FIVE

The day following Anna's arrival had been hot and wearying. The dust lay ankle-deep on the roads and wearily Ruth Dimblebee dragged her homeward bound feet through it at the end of her day's work. The struggle for existence was hard in these remote villages. Ruth had been out since early morning gathering garden produce for the market. Her young back ached, her hands were blistered, her limbs were stiff—all, she bitterly told herself, for fifteen miserable pence a day.

And Ruth was ambitious; her head was filled with madcap schemes and of so vivid an imagination was she possessed, that oftentimes she had difficulty in persuading herself the dreams she fondly indulged were unreal, and that she really was the child of humble stock, marked down to a life of drudging toil.

"Handsome Ruth" had been the villagers' choice for Queen of the May each successive year. No child in the countryside could hold a candle to her in the matter of looks. The unusually clear complexioned face was of a winsome oval; the nut brown eyes glanced tantalisingly beneath the arch of their brows; the well-moulded arms dimpled at the elbows; the hands, browned and roughened by toil were still shapely; and the cupid's bow of a mouth pouted petulantly or pursed invitingly to the eternal despair of the rustic swains. Her father being dead, and her mother blind, the child of eighteen summers, had to labour to keep the home going. She had often pleaded to be allowed to go "a-circussing" or "play-acting" but her pleadings had met with preptory refusal on the part of her mother and the daily grind had gone on.

However the dust was lighter through Queckett village, and her face brightening at some hidden thought, her heel regained its youthful spring. The village was typical of many such scattered along the Avon valley. The long street rambled up the side of the hill and bore on one side one of those primitive pathways of stone slabs peculiar to this corner of England. Above the thatched roofs towered the church, snugly esconced among age-old elms.

The girl turned into the gate of a cottage where sat her mother fingering the bobbins of her pillow, her sightless eyes turned towards the westering sun. The daughter's welcoming kiss was resented by the mother.

"Be'ee sick, mother?" she asked, wonderingly.

"Ay! sick and to death o' the likes o' thee!"

The girl's tears flowed at such a cold reception.

"If thee'st wise my maid, thee'll keep thee tears  
Th' Lord knows thee'll have use for 'un later on!"

"Why what be wrong, mother?" asked the girl in pained surprise.

"Ah thee'st know well enough. It may be the Lord have seen well to tak' away my sight but there be they who can see, an' what they do say, does thee no good. Thee bist no Dimblebee to go meandering wi' a Howarth. Both mine and thee father's family were decent folk; 'tis a shame thee should be our ruination!"

"Thee be too fond o' listenin' to gossip, mother. When thee'st cause to outcry against me I'll bide and listen. No man hereabouts will tempt me into anything unworthy of a Baddeley or a Dimblebee—least of all John Howarth!"

And somewhat enraged she proceeded indoors, deaf to the torrent of scolding that fell from her mother's lips.

Half-an-hour later she reappeared, all traces of dust and fatigue had vanished. Her smock had been replaced by a starched gown, white silver buckles shone from her velvet shoes. Her dark chestnut hair was bunched under a gay hat and as they searched the road ahead under the shadow of her hand, her eyes glowed expectantly. Deep resentment at her mother's scolding had prompted her to dress in her Sunday best and attempt to intercept the quarryowner on his journey home. If scolding was to be her portion she told herself, it might as well be for something as for nothing at all. Idle tongues had commenced to wag over a couple of accidental meetings she had had with Howarth, lately. Now, she reflected, she would give them something to wag about.

Passing down the garden path to an accompaniment of mingled threats and reproaches from her mother, the girl entered the road, holding up her skirts that they might not come in contact with the dust. She had an elegant air and when further down the road, a dark-visaged man stepped deliberately in her path, she tilted her chin and haughtily passed on.

But we must pause in our narrative and make the acquaintance of this new arrival; as he appears so frequently in the remainder of this history. He is short in stature, with a suggestion of hidden strength in his quick, lithe body. His skin is tawny which together with the hook at the bridge of his nose, the high cheek bones, low black brows, and drooping mouth, suggest him to be of Romany stock. A self-important swagger characterises his gait, but a searcher after visible signs of his character would probably note with interest the livid scars that line his cheeks, the pellet marks of a gamekeeper's muzzle-loader, and the gaps in the white teeth.

To all the countryside he is known as "Jew Boy Jo," a character who is ever at variance with the law. Of his score and a half years he has spent one fourth behind the high walls of Kingsnorton gaol. A section of the villagers admire his contempt for authority; his exploits stir them from a sluggish existence; he has become a sort of local celebrity and is indulged accordingly. As to his livelihood he gets that as best he can. Most cottages are open to him in bad weather; the woods and fields provide habitation in good.

It is possible that for sheer devilment Jew Boy Jo had stepped into Ruth's path, but when the latter treated him so preemptorily, he could not resist retaliation. He stepped alongside and attempted to take her arm.

Instantly her skirts were drawn aside, and she swept past majestically, withering the gipsy with a glance of scorn.

The latter's teeth bared in anger.

"Theest a fine one to ape the fine lady! What b'st thee when thee b'st comed to?" he sneered. In a sudden fit of fury he seized her gown at the shoulder and ripped it across so that the girl's arm gleamed bare.

"Thee dirty-skinned gaol bird!" hissed Ruth, "thee shall pay for this!"

The gipsy's grin of delight faded as a horseman appeared round the bend in the road, cantering towards them.

John Howarth, the horseman, took in the situation at a glance, and turned his horse in the direction of the gipsy. Realizing his danger, Jo leapt into the hedge, but Howarth, swerving inwards, leant from his saddle and swinging the handle of his heavy crop with unerring aim, caught the gipsy a terrible blow at the base of the skull.



"God! thees't killed him!" cried Ruth in terror as Jo sank to the earth limply.

The quarryowner reined in his horse and dismounted.

"Thank heaven!" he said turning the body with his foot.

"But—'tis murder. They'll hang 'ee for 't."

"'Tis more likely they'll thank me for ridding the countryside of a great pest."

The sight of blood sent Ruth clambering over the fencing to a water trough. There she tore a length from her cambric underskirt for a bandage for the gipsy's head.

While she bathed the wound and bandaged it, Howarth lit a cigarette casually, never lifting a finger to help her. Nor would he go for help, but stood there beside his horse, unconcernedly watching the girl's efforts to revive the wounded man.

Presently the gipsy's eyes opened and commenced to stare around.

"You have Ruth to thank for your life," said Howarth, addressing him, "had she listened to me, your body would have lain in yonder ditch where it fell!"

Jo muttered something inaudible; he struggled to his knees, and felt at his head. Standing unsteadily he ripped off the bloodstained bandages and flung them to the ground. Then slipping out the blade of a clasp knife he lunged at the quarryowner. Howarth avoided him and as he tumbled in the grass, promised him a thrashing if he did not clear off as quick as he could.

He regretted his leniency the next minute, for staggering to his feet Jo disappeared behind the waiting horse, into whose neck he plunged the blade with a savage strength..

When he was aware of what had occurred, Howarth captured the gipsy, and stripping the wounded horse of its girths slipped a noose at one end and threw the ends upon an overhanging branch.

'What's thee gwan to do with 'un?' asked Ruth, terrified by the awfulness of Howarth's features.

"Nought but what he has deserved these last ten years!"

Roughly he grasped the weakened gipsy, and dragging him to the noose, slipped it over his head, and prepared to hang him.

"No one but the devil is likely to hear a prayer for you," he said, addressing Jo, "but if you remember one, you had better say it now—you will have need of it hence!"

The gipsy's audacious spirit tried to rally, but the grim, set face of the quarryowner, warned him the present was no time for foolery. However, he could not forbear replying:

"Thees't a fine one to say that! All the popes ever born prayin' for a twelvemonth cuss't gain a absolvin' o' thee!"

Howarth clutched at the loose end, the noose tightened about Jo's throat; he was lifted off his feet.

The quarryowner's horrible purpose was not lost on Ruth. She flung herself upon him in entreaty, and so hampered him that the girth fell from his hand before he could secure it, and the gipsy fell to the ground, a limp bundle of half strangled humanity.

Howarth tried to push her off; but she was persistent in her appeals for the gipsy. Ignoring all rebuffs, she planted herself over the fallen man and stoutly refused to allow Howarth to carry out his fell purpose.

"Let un bide; she said, "'tis like enough he'll die wi' that crack on his head!"

Thwarted Howarth turned to the horse that lay in its last death throes, bleeding from the gaping wound in the neck. It was the quarryowner's favorite mare, and as he took up the poor creature's head, it turned great questioning eyes upon him. After it had rolled over on its side dead, the man took its nose between his hands and kissed it passionately.

He crossed over to the trough where Ruth was washing the blood from her hands. Jo had crawled out of sight, and apparently, they were alone.

Poor Ruth's starched gown was in a sorry plight, torn and stained; her shoes were wet and crumpled, and the festoons of her hat hung ridiculously over its brim.

Howarth laughed as he surveyed her.

"You seem to have suffered more than anyone—Vixen excepting!" he said.

Ruth resented the laugh, replying indignantly:

"Who b'st thee to bide an' laugh at I? Not all men be like Jew Boy Jo! There be they who be stronger even than thee—for all thy girt height—bigness o' body be not everything!"

"True but why do you tell me that?"

"Cause if thee cussn't keep a civil tongue in thee head, there be they who'll make thee!"

"Nobody ever 'made' me do anything in my life and certainly no clown in this countryside will be allowed the privilege now. But what have I done that you should threaten me with the horny knuckles of big Andrew Devitt?"

The girl turned sharply.

"How did'st thee know I did mean Andy?" she asked.

"I did not know ; I only guessed it. I have seen Andrew and yourself together quite a lot lately. Last night you were with him in the Minnowbrook."



"Yes; 'twas said ghosts did come to th' Manor, an we did scout for 'un!"

"And did you find them?"

"No."

"You were not so fortunate as myself— twice today have I seen a Boulton in broad daylight."

"Lord! a ghost in daylight!" Ruth shivered at the thought

"Not exactly. But surely you have heard that a Boulton is staying with Parson Haviland?"

"There be some gossip in the village, but I do not let it concern me. 'Tis nought but sour looks I do get in Queckett village, and all along o' gaddin wi' thee!"

Night had now descended upon the earth as they made their way over the rough bridleway. Beyond the low stile that halted their advance the white road gleamed in the moonlight.

Howarth placed his hand on her shoulder protectingly.

"Never mind them," he said reassuringly, "They are jealous of our friendship. If you will do as I say you will be able to snap your finger at them all in a very short time."

"What is that?" she asked eagerly.

"Oh! little enough. For reasons of my own I desire to know what is taking place at the Manor. It would be easy for you to get into the service of the new mistress. You are quick intelligent—and pretty—and would make an excellent maid. What do you think?"

Ruth was very flattered.

"At worst it would be better than celery pulling at Ladd's Nursery, but I dussn't play spy."

"It is not necessary. All that I would want would not require you to act the spy. 'Twould be only to be informed on her domestic arrangements."

Ruth considered the question before replying.

"I am not satisfied 'twould be all square."

The night was getting cold and as a group of pot-valiants sauntered down the road to a ribald tune, he pressed for her answer. His whispered promises of reward decided her.

"Very well," she replied.

He drew her into the hedge as the singers passed by, in order to shield her from observation. She wrongly divined his intention.

"G'wan thee girt zoppy!" she giggled.

After she had gone he waited until a light appeared in her bedroom window. The tallow candle flickered and threatened to set alight the fluttering curtains at the open window. Presently he saw Ruth's face peering anxiously in the rude mirror.

"Poor devil!" he murmured as he turned into the village street and began the long journey home to Wichenden Lodge.

## CHAPTER SIX

Anna spent the weeks following her arrival very quietly. After her breathless, rugged western life, the peaceful seclusion of the Rectory House exercised a potent charm. Essentially a child of Nature—her tastes simple and wholesome, her interests and sympathies large and sincere, untouched by the craving for things shallow and garish that so often grows with the dwelling in cities, the prairie girl was supremely happy and content with all that her new surroundings had to offer.

From sun-up to sun-down she filled her days with incident and drank her fill of the glories that the countryside poured from its inexhaustible store with lavish hand. How glorious to rise from the downy bed at the call of the lark! To scent the fragrance of that wonderful garden through the open casement! To watch the sun flood the valley and chase away the shadows from its miles of undulating green. To walk through dewy fields to Braxendale Wood, or to the old Saxon mill by Open-marsh village, or to make the ascent of the lofty slopes and watch the river below pursue its eternal pilgrimage to the sea! Oh! they were happy days! Often for hours together would she lie on a hillock, her chin resting upon her hands, caught in the magic spell of the countryside.

She soon knew each sound as it came to her on the breeze: the ring of the blacksmith's hammer on the anvil; the buzz of the homing bee; the low of the browsing kine; the caw of the rooks in the tall elms; the song of the ascending lark; the drone of the far off saw mill and the swish of the waters of the millrace.

Each day held its own little mystery: a peculiar bird; a strange flower; a quaint custom; a dialectic phrase—all of which needed solving—and Robert Haviland was kept busy answering her queries. The Rector's initial qualms had gradually dispelled; indeed he found much to admire in the girl's simple tastes, and as he watched each day add to the beauty of form and face and inherent gracefulness, each act of charity reveal a selflessness and concern for others, his admiration grew until he told himself that Anna approached his ideal of a woman more nearly than anyone he had before met.

He yielded to her wishes in everything; personally superintended the laying of the little meals they had together; took her with him on his rounds of the cottages; drove her to market if the day was fine, or amused her indoors if wet. In a score of ways he endeavoured to contribute to her happiness. Hour upon hour he sat scheming for her, drawing up plans for the development of her estates; designing the decorations for the interior of her rooms at the Manor, or studying the architecture of the period to prevent the building from being vulgarized.

Restoration of the Manor was proceeding apace. An army of builders and decorators were installed and had transformed the place into a huge workshop, appearing to revel in the frightful mess they made everywhere. On this particular morning an unusual activity prevailed in the Rectory House. The previous night Anna had announced that she would take a ride in the morning, and although the only mount the Rectory boasted was the old mare Sarah, the girl was undismayed, indeed, elated at the prospect of a gallop.

"Anna," said Robert Haviland, "If only I could say half as much of your mount as of you, what a pretty picture you would make."

The girl coloured. Long ago they had abandoned the stiff and formal 'Miss' and 'Mr.' but she had never really got used to the familiarity.

"Yes;" she replied, eyeing Sarah with a doubtful glance, "I had thought to kill at a hundred yards at least, but this nag is likely to lessen the distance some." She trailed back a strand of spun gold hair under the green felt hat and toyed with the smocking about the yoke of her coat.

"If I did not know you would forever taunt me with it, I would abandon this ride," she said doubtfully. "But as it is I am determined to see it through."

Haviland laughed. "Keep away from the ditches then; they are not yet dry from the recent rains, and Sarah's particular luxury is a mud bath."

In the days of her youth Sarah had been an animal of some distinction, having lifted quite a few trophies at rural point-to-points. She had a wise old head, useful forequarters, but her forelegs had been ruined by twelve years of steady roadwork. In colour she was light chestnut with a long, hogged mane, of snowy white with tail to match. Many years had elapsed since last she had been ridden and it was with an ill-grace that she submitted to the patronizing slaps of the girl's gloved hand.

However she went off at a steady trot, and crossing the bridge Anna headed her for the Kingsnorton road. Just before they attained Coombe Dayrell village a gate led to the fields of the Minnowbrook and through it they went, the mare breaking into a canter reminiscent of her old sporting days, as she felt the springy sod beneath her hoofs. Away she went with a toss of her head, but when the girl set her at a low fence she refused absolutely to jump. The obstacle was quite within her power—a low, rough fencing covered with

brambles - and wheeling the horse around, Anna set her at it a second time. The mare realizing that she had on her back a being resolute and capable, shot high into the air, landing on the top of the opposite bank with an ease that showed it was not want of power but want of courage that ailed her. They made better progress at the next meadow, and thinking to take a dried up ditch in their stride Anna chirruped encouragement to her mount. Sarah's answer was a tremour of fear, but it was too late to alter their course, and at the critical moment the horse swerved badly, and scuttled down the deep bank side into the soft mud at the bottom. As the horse rolled over on its back Anna was pitched headlong into the mud from which she had some difficulty in extricating herself. She grasped a bush on the bank side and surveyed her mount in high disfavour. The mare still lay where she had fallen, a ludicrous spectacle with her four legs pointed skywards. Suddenly she rolled over on her side and attempted to rise, but the thick slime held her fast, and she lapsed into a philosophic patience.

Anna could not suppress a laugh, despite the fact that her clothes were mud-stained and torn the ridiculousness of the situation appealed to her most.

Presently a head appeared above the fencing.

"Are you hurt?" asked a man's voice.

"Not bodily," replied Anna peeling off her gloves.

The man climbed the fencing and stretched out an arm.

"Come," he called cheerily, "Let me help you out. There! Both hands! Never mind the mud."

There was a scatter of loose earth and mud and the girl regained the field.

The horse was not so easily retrieved. It required the united efforts of the girl and the man to coax her upon her legs.

A poor forlorn object she looked standing almost knee-deep in black ooze. At length she was hauled to dry ground, and the dripping saddle removed.

"I'm afraid this means an end to your morning ride," he said, surveying the mud-covered animal.

"Yes; I was foolish to start out on such a mount. She is past jumping."

"You are right. Ten years ago she would have cleared that obstacle increased four times, but road work has stiffened her legs. Let me help you clean yourself, and then whilst I take this equine scarecrow over to the sheep pond to make her presentable, you can ride my grey Arab. You will find him tied to the fencing by yonder oak"

"But are you not scared to trust me with him after my poor showing?"

"I saw enough to understand it was no fault of yours the mare came to grief. Your horsecraft deserves a better mount, in my Aeolus you will find it."

They walked over to where the grey Arab colt pawed the turf in impatience. He uttered a low whinny of pleasure as they approached. He was an aristocrat of the first degree—a handsome, proudly stepping creature with breeding writ large in every curve of his beautiful body. With an exclamation of admiration, Anna surveyed the perfect slope of his shoulders, the power of his great quarters, the small, finely moulded head, the gloss of his coat, the sensitive nostrils and mouth of silk.

"What a beauty!" she said, "Wherever did you get him?"

"Aeolus is from the famous Rol Herode family. His sire was Agamemnon, known throughout England as a first flight champion. Aeolus is probably a descendant of the Arab steeds that history tells us the Romans used

in their sports at the Coliseum, for Roi Herode's pedigree can be traced back to the time when his progenitors' records were carved in stone and buried for countless ages to be subsequently unearthed by digging Egyptologists."

"How proud you must be of such an animal. Sarah seems a lamentable creak beside him, and to judge by the manner in which she hangs her head, the fact is not lost upon her."

"Now jump up; and if it is on your conscience, retrieve your reputation as a horsewoman."

Anna needed no second bidding. The Arab wheeled nervously as she attained his back without hardly an effort.

"May I take a fence or two?" she asked.

"Certainly! Aeolus will probably take them whether you want him to or not."

The man would have said more but the horse swung around, dancing with impatience at any delay.

The Arab was well named. When Anna loosened her rein he proved himself to be a veritable god of the wind, his feet scarcely touching the ground as they flew over the long stretch of meadowland. At the end of the meadow a steep hedge obstructed them, but horse and rider rose perfectly and naturally as the swell of a wave and cleared it with one bound.

When she returned from the canter, Anna could not find words in which to express her admiration for the colt.

"He is beautiful," she said, "So speedy, so strong, so intelligent, and yet so obedient. He answered to every wish as soon as I conveyed it to him. At the spinney I thought I was in for another spill. The hedge there hides a deep ditch beyond, and not knowing it to be there I took the jump rather short. But even in mid-



air, Aeolus saw a mistake had been made and made a double spring that landed us safely. I suppose you are not thinking of putting him in the market?"

The man turned and surveyed the horse.

"What is he worth to you?" he asked.

"I do not know. I am not well used to English values or English currency for that matter. But a good deal, I guess."

"To amount of money would induce me to part with him," the man answered, "I have watched over him since the day he was born. And yet——." He paused gravely, as you value the colt, and are desirous of getting possession of him, I suppose it can be done."

"How?"

The man waited a long time before replying.

"If you consented to certain proposals of mine, I would allow you to ride him home as your property."

The girl's eyes opened wide in astonishment. What interest could this man—an absolute stranger, have in her as to make her such a gift for no apparent reason.

"You see," he explained, "many years ago someone did something to someone else and a feud started. One of the someones was a Boulton and the other a Howarth—but it has been such ages ago as to matter little now. Just as you are the last of the Boultons, I am the last of the Howarths and the folly of such an absurd state of affairs as formerly existed being revived must be apparent to you. Therefore, I propose we cry a truce on our forefathers' folly and to seal our pledge Aeolus shall be yours."

He held out his hand, but the girl shrank from him. Howarth! The name had always been coupled with a curse whenever it had escaped her father's lips. What should she do? She felt the man was right and that the feud should end, but the matter was not one that could be settled with a decision on the spur of the moment.



Squarely she faced her family's enemy. Before his towering figure she felt like the fabled lamb.

"I have neither wish nor intention of living at variance with my neighbors," she said, "but this matter is different. I may find that it is something over which I have no control, and until I am certain of the correct course to take, Aeolus must remain in your keeping"

The man bowed solemnly, at her ruling and they parted.

## ANNA OF THE TROUBLED VALLEY

### CHAPTER SEVEN

Despite the fine canter she had had on Aeolus, Anna chose to regard her morning ride as a failure. The unexpected meeting with Howarth depressed her, and her misgivings deepened at Robert Haviland's evident annoyance when she related the morning's happenings to him. He avoided her direct enquiries as to the course she should follow and left her in a state of uncomfortable indecision.

"It is a direct issue," she had pleaded, "I am asked to declare myself either a friend or an enemy. To me it seems absurd to bear malice towards an entire stranger. Please tell me what I should do."

"Of course it was inevitable," he replied, "your meeting with the man. To have escaped it this morning would only have deferred the matter. What I regret is that he should have tried to force you to declare your attitude towards him. From what I know of Howarth he must have some strong ulterior motive to offer friendship to a Boulton. I can only advise you to avoid him as much as possible and to keep up a show of neutrality. I know what your father's wishes in the matter would be, but I am a Christian minister and could not advise anyone to bear malice."

And at this unsatisfactory juncture the matter rested, apparently.

However the days passed without any further encounter with the quarryowner, whose name was scarcely uttered by them and who came to be almost forgotten by the girl. A break had occurred in the weather, and the rain had the effect of keeping them indoors. One morning Anna came downstairs to find Haviland in the



little sitting room. He had clearly not slept, for his face was drawn and haggard, his eyes burned dully in sunken sockets. The skin about his cheek twitched oddly, and as he clutched at the back of a chair for support his breath was laboured and irregular.

Anna crossed over to him in alarm. "Robert," she said, "you are ill?"

"It is nothing," he replied, "only a passing spasm."

The words belied his appearance and as he moved towards a chair he staggered perilously. Instantly the girl's strong young arm was about his shoulder, and with a sigh of relief he rested against the couch. Anna's warm heart was touched by the intense agony apparent in her friend's face.

"Robert; dear Robert," she whispered, "what can I get you? Let me call the doctor—it may be serious!"

"Oh; no," he said with an effort at carelessness, "It will soon pass!"

She propped the pillows about him and he appeared to doze. Stooping over him she pressed her lips to where the hair at his temple had greyed.

He started at the action and their eyes met.

"I love you Robert," she said unashamedly, "in the same way that I loved your brother Ned—as someone near and dear to me—as an elder brother. Do you not love me too?"

He pressed her hand to his lips in reply. The pain had attacked him again, and calling Anthony, Anna insisted on his being put to bed.

The Coombe Dayrell surgeon, Dr. Earnshaw, shook his head gravely over the sick cleric. A sort of mystery pervaded the house as black-coated callers came and went, and being denied entrance to the sick chamber,

Anna suffered acutely as the hours dragged on and the silence to which the house had been enjoined remained unbroken.

Anna did not sleep that night. For long periods she lay listening to the drip, drip of the rain outside. A light burned in the sick chamber and between them Elspeth and Anthony kept an all-night vigil. Passionately the girl had pleaded to be allowed to take her turn, but the doctor would not hear of it, and all she could do was to listen to the scarcely stifled groaning of the sufferer. The sound wrung her heart; she realized how dear Robert Haviland had become to her, of how much she valued his friendship; and often during the night she knelt by her bed to intercede with God in his behalf.

Rain still poured from the leaden skies on the morrow but as noon time approached, a shamefaced sun struggled through the cloud-banks and the weather began to clear. Finding she could be of no assistance in the house, Anna threw on a raincoat and crossed over to Queckett Church. It was a fine old building. Its slender Decorated spire rose gracefully from the western tower supported by four flying buttresses terminated by crocketed pinnacles and formed a landmark for miles along the Avon Valley. The gem of the building, architecturally, was the south porch doorway. This had open sides divided by short columns with traceried heads. The inner doorway was richly decorated between the arch and drip moulding with a graceful line of ball flowers. The sedilia and piscina in the chancel wall were admirable and of the same character as the porch; and on the north side a bust in a niche perpetuated the memory of Edmund Eyre, Rector of Queckett 1561-1594, and represented him in gown and quilled ruff. Also in the chancel were some carved miserere seats,

a chained bible and an old helmet surmounted by a crest of a bird.

Anna hesitated at the doorway. A ghostly presence seemed to hover about the high columns of the long nave; the light struggled bravely through the stained glass of the east window, but it failed to penetrate the deep gloom of the darkened chancel in which burned seven altar lamps—seven red points of fire that only intensified the darkness.

But her eyes became accustomed to the gloom. She could discern the white and gold communion cloth, the arums and the great ivory crucifix.

And then, she became aware of another's presence in the building. She sensed the growth of a dark grey patch at the foot of the chancel steps. In the darkness it was scarcely discernable—a nebulous something that one might easily believe to be the reaction of a strained optic nerve. But it moved, attained the chancel floor, and against the gleaming background of the altar cloth, Anna saw that it was a man.

He approached the sanctuary with shuffling steps; his attitude was more curious than reverent; he fingered the heavy communion plate, and stared with interest at the figure on the cross.

Fearing sacrilege, Anna hurried up the chancel steps. The stranger turned hastily and would have fled, but seeing it was a woman who had interrupted him, waited with an indifferent expression on his face. It was the gipsy who had received such rough handling from Howarth when last we saw him.

At her approach he turned his attention to the fine East window. This was divided into compartments depicting the seven sorrows of the Virgin. Under each compartment was a Latin inscription which the gipsy

commenced to spell aloud, appearing much chagrined at getting no sense from it..

Anna came to his rescue.

"The window illustrates the Seven Sorrows of the Virgin Mary. In the first compartment is the prediction of Simeon; the second, the flight into Egypt; the third, the loss of Jesus in Jerusalem; the fourth, the sight of Jesus bearing the Cross; the sixth, the piercing of the side of Jesus; and the seventh the burial of Jesus."

She found Jo an interested pupil. He had heard little of the Scriptures and the gospel stories fascinated him. Anna was amazed at his ignorance and irreverence, but persisted in her self-appointed task, and when they left the building she had succeeded in enlightening him not a little.

The scar on his temple had scarcely healed, and Anna's eye rested on it wonderingly.

"'Tis nought," he assured her, "only a cut from Wicked Jack's crop. I did slit his mare's throat, though," he added proudly.

"Why so? Whatever Howarth might have done to you, his horse should not be made to suffer!"

"Mebbee not; but he did love the mare and 'twas a sorry blow for him. But worse will follow—I only do bide and wait my chance. A body dussn't hit I for nought, I'll tell 'ee missy."

"For shame Jo, after all I have told you of the forgiving Christ."

Jo laughed heartily.

"Forgivin'!" he repeated, "God dussn't mean folk like Wicked Jack when he do tell us to forgive our enemies. He'll find it mighty hard to forgive Jacky, Hissself!"

The gipsy's laugh echoed in the girl's ears as she passed through the avenue of beech trees that flanked

the churchyard path. Striking a field path she headed for the Manor which she found to be encompassed by a network of scaffolding.

Great progress had been made in the interior and many rooms were already habitable and occupied by domestics. The flat ceilings had been removed and the open timber roofs revealed; likewise the walls had been stripped of their coating of plaster and the panelling and tapestries beneath restored. The grime and dust of years had been removed, and as she entered the Hall the place smelled sweet and fresh. The original heraldic glass had been replaced in the windows in a great display of colour; suits of armour and ancient weapons stood or hung by the broad staircase and on the walls.

Ruth Dimblebee, trim and neat, ushered her new mistress into a room on the ground floor where the restorers had been busy. They had uncovered some fine linen-fold oak panelling and an elaborately carved mantlepiece, and had removed the ugly modern ceiling that had hidden the oak roof of fluted girders and joists for a hundred years. A carved Gothic Cabinet, antique tables and chairs fitted into their corners as though they had stood there for a couple of centuries, and a magnificently carved Elizabethan chest stood proudly by the window invoking admiration and thanks for its rescue from the heap of rubbish to which it had been consigned.

"This is getting to be more like home every day," said Anna enraptured.

"When will 'ee claim it?" asked Ruth.

"Not yet; I have no desire to leave the Rectory. Maybe, after harvest time. Then I shall promote you from the kitchen to be my personal help."

"Thank 'ee, Ma'am; an' do I get a promotion in wages?"



## CHAPTER EIGHT

The Rector's illness proved to be more severe than was at first anticipated. Weeks had dragged on without any sign of an improvement and Anna had found it necessary to take up residence at the Manor much earlier than she had intended. She soon found that proprietorship of the Manor carried with it a multitude of cares, and she was constantly being called upon to think and to act for herself.

She was a daily visitor to the sick bed, and when he was able to bear the strain of conversation, the Rector advised her as to the re-stocking and re-planning which she had inaugurated on her farm. New barns were under construction and old ones under repair; the Eastern wing of the Manor House had been fitted up for the housing of the farm labourers, hands had been engaged and reaping time had come and gone amid a scene of great animation.

These scenes were renewed at the in-gathering of the grain. With a right good will the harvesters toiled. Every able-bodied man, woman and child was pressed into service—so scarce was labour—and many of the women made up beds in the corn for their babies, who slept peacefully while their mothers toiled. From the freshness of early morning through the heat of the day to the cool of evening, the "haulers" worked, rousing the sleepy hamlets with their light-hearted songs, filling the stack yards with the cheerful sounds of their toil, until the last wagon was loaded and it but remained for the Mistress of the Manor to haul aloft the last sheaf.

During the short period she had been among them, Anna had won her way into the hearts of the country-

folk. The Boultons had always commanded respect in the Avon Valley, and she found them willing in every way to help her in her task of re-organization.

When Anna stepped forward, fork in hand, to hoist the last sheaf, old Caleb Netherway stayed her hand, and in a few rough words assured her of the goodwill of her new tenants and workmen. Deep throated "Huzzahs!" greeted this speech, and were renewed when Anna, in quite professional style, deftly swung the sheaf to the top of the wagon.

At the corner of the field a foaming mug of home-brewed ale slaked each parched throat and laughter and jesting greeted the fortunate ones who, by craft or cunning, secured a second or third quart. They shouldered their tools in the fading light and the creaking wagons led the way to the Manor House where the safe in-gathering of the grain would be celebrated with song, dance and jollification.

Their way led through the rough cobbled street of Combe Dayrell, past the hoary old church whose squat tower had witnessed innumerable harvestings; past the trim Vicarage, picking up stragglers on the way—for all were welcome at the Manor Harvest Home.

Several of the cavalcade were unable, through the force of habit, to pass the "Cardinal Wolsey" and broke the ranks.

Some men were seated before the hostelry who had eyed the procession with mingled feelings. One of their number, a wizened-faced old man, turned to the invaders and addressed Caleb Netherway with just the suspicion of a smile at the corner of his lips:

"Wheer b'st g'wan—Psalm singen, Caleb?"

The old man scented the note of sarcasm.

"Bah! Thee'st only envious! I mind the time when thee'st fiddled at a Haulen Hwome till thee fingers cussn't straddle a quart pot."

"'Tis very well for the likes o' thee to be singen and prayen—thee do need to do summat to mak' thee peace above. But these y-here Haulen Hwomes be all wrong in my reckonin. For 'tis a law o' natur that do bring th' harvest and if theer be a party to be thankful to, it be natur, an' th' sowers an' th' reapers, an' th' haulers!"

"'Twould be more to thee credit, Mickey Jason if thee'st come and gid we a hand wi' th' praisen instead o' makin' a mockery o' sacred things. Like enow Betsy an' th' lil' ones 'll be on the Manor Ground betimes when th' \*Gleanen bell calls!"

"'Tis no business o' mine what Betsy be at," answered Micky, "But what hast theer done in th' haulen that thee be g'wan to sing songs, over, Caleb?"

"Zummat that thees't a stranger to—honest hard work!"

"Maybe we'm strangers to honest—but not to hard work—Wicked Jack do see to that! Come along o' we and try it, Caleb; 'twill do thee a power o' good."

The old man looked into his quart pot and shook his head doubtfully.

"I be glad to be back at work for a Boulton—in all the broad acres of this shire there be no better employers than they—and Miss Anna be a chip of the old block and no mistake!"

**\*Gleaning Bell**—This custom is now almost extinct. The Gleaning Bell was rung at the Parish Church to notify the villagers of the time to commence gleaning. It was usually rung from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The Bell-ringer was paid one penny by each family gleaning.

"Ay; that she be;" chorused a group of labourers.

They all drank deep and long, but whether in honour of the old man's sentiments or merely to quench their several thirsts, was not clear.

After Netherway and his men had left, Jason sat in deep thought. The little fellow was possessed of strange reactionary notions which he never hesitated to disseminate among the rustic element around him.

With Dawkins, the foreman at the Openmarsh Quarries, and Reuben Livingstone, a "travelled" man. Micky shared the honours of being the most widely known rustic in the three villages of Combe Dayrell, Openmarsh and Queckett. The unlearned rustics mistook Jason's empty bravadoes for strong candour, his sweeping iconoclasm for free-thinking, his shallow platitudes for profound wisdom. His favorite aversion was men of Caleb Netherway's type—"thê contented" workman, staunch to his master, a type very plentiful in all country villages.

"He be a fine sample o' a worken man," he commented, "one o' th' damned 'as 'twas in the beginnin' sort! The countryside be g'wan to the dogs—an' fast—through th' likes o' he. Whilst there be Caleb Netherway's willing to be ground, there'll be maisters and mistresses willing to grind un."

"Ay; an' Jew Boy Jo's willen to fleece un," interrupted one of the labourers.

When Micky looked up with a puzzled air, the labourer proceeded to enlighten him.

"Thy do say as how Jew Boy Jo wi' a double-headed penny won seven quarts o' Caleb's harvest ale, an' sold un back to him at tuppence a quart. Wi' th' fourteen pence he did buy a gilt watch on 'Norten Market Hill, an' after taken out the works sold un' to Caleb for half-a-crown."

A chorus of laughter interrupted the narrative.

"O' course the watch wouldn't go, an' Caleb let un have un back for sixpence. Then Jo did put back the works an when Caleb seed un a worken, he cussn't bide till he had buyed un back for two shillen. But 'twasn't for long it did go, an Joshua Hoyle at the Schoolhouse did say 'twere no good—Bruma something he did call un."

Loud laughter greeted the labourer's story, even Mallard, the innkeeper, joining in.

"The angels will have a rare pother disposen o' Caleb," he joked ponderously, "he be too tough to blossom in the heaven he be allus singen about, an' too green to burn down below."

The arrival of Dawkins, the quarry foreman, a large man with a fierce looking moustache, was a signal for a general replenishing of mugs, and the rest of the labourers shuffled nearer the three luminaries upon whom generally devolved the onus of the night's conversation.

"Any news 'Norten way?" asked Jason of the new-comer.

"Nought that be good: Son John do say as how th' union did decide to appoint a deppytation to wait on th' maisters wi' evidence."

"Evidence?"

"Ay; evidence that th' cost o' livin' be on the rise, an' the state o' trade do warrant a increase. But 'tis said th' maisters will refuse to meet th' deppytation an' will declare a lockout."

"'Norten 'll be a good place to watch, presently," observed Reuben Livingstone.

"Ay; an' Combe Dayrell, too" said Dawkins, "they do say as how the new Mistress be a-offering quarrymen fourpence-ha'penny an hour for a five our week!"

"A ha'penny more than we'm getting," broke in some of the labourers.

Micky Jason held his peace the while he made a mental calculation as to how many quarts of ale, fifty additional ha'pence per week would buy. He recovered his breath, however.

"Then we mun be after Jacky for a increase," he said.

The idea of anyone asking Howarth for an increase of wages tickled the company immensely. Jason's indignant scowl around suppressed the tittering.

"Th countryside be a-wakin' up," he said vigorously pounding the bench before him, "the Lord knows it have been asleep long enow. The towns are getting their increases an' fightin' wher the maisters do resist. 'Norten is solid for a increase; the cloth trade have paid big dividends this last ten year or more, yet the men get no share in th' wealth they do produce—only a miserable pittance, hardly enow to keep body an' soul together. We'm the same here—an' when I do say we mun advance wi' the times, there be some who do bide an sneer. You'm poor softs to let Wicked Jack ride over thee carcasses as it do please him. Demand a increase—demand it, I say—an' if Jacky do choose to resist we'll leave th' quarries an' break th' head of every peeler they do send to keep th' peace!"

"Steady there, Micky Jason," remonstrated the innkeeper, "them's no sentiments to be tolerated on my premises! I'm for law an' order, I am. A public servant mun abide by the law, howsomever it do cross his views. Keep your speeches for them as do like them."

An awkward silence followed, and to fill the void he called to his wife to replenish the ale pots.

At length Dawkins turned squarely to the innkeeper.

"The ha'penny an hour be nought but our rights, which we have a right to defend. A pretty pass things be comed

to if th' likes o' you as have lived fat off th' sweat o' our brows, be allowed to dictate HOW we mun defend our rights."

"Mallard allus have opposed th'worken men," added Reuben Livingstone, "I mind the time when th' Bristol men did march to Lunden an' Mallard refused 'em food an' lodgin' an' hoped they'd starve afore they reached Trafalgar Square."

Nine host flushed angrily under the accusations.

"If thee dussn't like it thee do know what to do!" he grumbled.

"An' we'll do it," chorused the company, drinking up their beer.

When they had passed out of sight, the landlord's wife turned to her spouse in disgust.

"A fine one thee," she said, "to turn away good money wi' thee fool's tongue."

But Mallard only sighed heavily.

"They'll be back tomorrow night right as rain," he said, "now that The Ram be closed the only alternative is The Lion an' Fiddle at Queckett, but I be unaseerd o' THAT alternative. Joe Gumm's swipes will send 'em here tomorrow—thee mark my word!"

## CHAPTER NINE

Kingsnorton was an ancient town that had of recent years expanded considerably. The history of the place was largely writ in the fluctuating fortunes of the cloth industry that formed its staple trade. Local enterprise had furnished the latest and greatest phase in establishing a series of huge mills at the Eastern end of the town and around them had sprung a large colony of artisans' dwellings. The peak of the town's new importance had been reached some years previously when, in preference to several others it had been made a County Borough.

Mercilessly the wheels of progress had ground the old town out of existence, leaving only the narrow High Street to the antiquarian. Up this street one caught a glimpse of old Kingsnorton in the irregular outline of the overhanging gables of its shops and houses—old, re-cased gothic structures, with low roofed fronts supported by the oaken arcades of the Middle Ages.

An old-time poet had sung the praises of the place in no half-hearted manner, and the following quotation from his works had been lettered in gilt and hung prominently in the vestibule of the Town House:—

"Kingsnorton, a prettie town, full fine,  
Which may be loved, be likate and prayсед both;  
It stands so trim and is maintayned so cleane,  
And peopled is with folk that do well meane,  
That it deserves to be enrolled and shryned,  
In each good breast, and ev'ry manly mynd."



But, Kingsnorton had latterly fallen from grace and was fast losing its reputation of being a peaceful community.

Consequent upon a local shortage of skilled labour, the millowners had imported clothworkers from Bradford in Yorkshire. These men were quick to note the difference in the working conditions prevailing in unorganized Kingsnorton from those to which they had been accustomed at home, where the clothworkers' Union roster contained eighty-five per cent. of the tradesmen's names. They became dissatisfied, their dissatisfaction spread among the local men who struck off a provisional committee with a view to forming a branch of the Union, and to approach the millowners regarding an immediate improvement in the matter of both hours and wages.

At first the millowners regarded this collective bargaining as a novelty—a mere toy weapon that would break at the haft with the first blow, but after awhile they became alarmed at its possibilities and conceived the idea of stamping out the new movement among their employees. Men who were regarded as dangerous were discharged and bundled out of the colony, the houses of which were mostly owned by the millowners. Others were intimidated into inaction and a system of spies was established in the mills so thoroughly that no man knew just whom his neighbor was.

But with all their browbeating and low cunning the employers could not eradicate the men's aspirations regarding the establishment of union principles in the working of the mills, and a membership approximating thirty per cent. of the staffs was secretly recruited and properly constituted into a local union.

When they were made aware of this state of affairs the millowners realized that only wholesale deportations could stem the movement, and as they were



already operating under a labour shortage, they hesitated to act until some equally effective method could be decided upon.

But their hesitation proved costly, from their point of view. The advantages of belonging to the union became speedily to be realized by the craftsmen, and the membership went up by leaps and bounds until sixty per cent. of the total employees of the mills had either taken the union pledge or had promised to support any movement by the organization.

And whilst the millowners were still debating an effective method of dealing with the menace, a demand for recognition was presented by the newly-elected officials, and accompanying the demand was a list of suggested reforms in the working conditions of the mills.

The millowners' reply took the form of immediate dismissal of the signatories to the document, an act that was swiftly followed by a cessation of work on the part of every man who had taken the union pledge.

Those who remained at work were subjected to annoyance by the strikers and frequent brushes with the police occurred. For a week or ten days this had gone on until so serious did the outlook seem that the Mayor took upon himself the task of mediator. But all his good intentions were of no avail. The millowners absolutely refused to sit in conference with the men's representatives and a deadlock occurred.

And day by day, desertions from the ranks of the "loyal" employees strengthened the cause of the men, and the owners realizing that something must be done—and speedily—if their trade was not to be ruined, finally consented to have the questions of recognition and hours and wages, arbitrated by a committee of five: two representatives of each side and an independent chairman.

This arrangement much cheered the people, and they were hopeful of something tangible resulting when quite suddenly negotiations were stopped through the owners insisting on the men's case being argued by independent local gentlemen of whose appointments they must first approve. The injustice of such a course aroused popular indignation and the few men left in the mills ceased work as a protest. But the owners were resolute in their insistence, and after awhile won their point.

It was no easy task for the men to select their representatives; at their meetings names were submitted and following a long process of elimination, two names were forwarded to the Mayor who in turn submitted them to the millowners for approval. This was forthcoming next day and the Mayor announced to an excited populace the personnel of the arbitration board as follows:—

For the Owners—Hugh Stonley, president of the Western Clothing Mill Company; and John Howarth, quarryowner, of Wichenden.

For the Men—Edward Ramsden, barrister, Kingsnorton, and Robert Haviland, clerk in holy orders, Queckett.

The Mayor offered himself as chairman and was accepted by both parties.

Lively scenes had marked the opening sittings of this commission and a mass of evidence was taken relative to both sides of the question in dispute.

On this particular morning under notice the arbitration board had held a stormy meeting in the Town Hall. Protests by both Ramsden and Haviland had been lodged at the stonewall methods employed by Stonley and Howarth particularly the latter. Appeals by the Mayor had been listened to without having any result, and at the conclusion of an impassioned but

futile appeal to reason by Haviland, Edward Ramsden signified his intention of withdrawing from the board as a protest against the non-conciliatory attitude of the employers' representatives. At this the meeting ended in uproar. A great crowd of clothworkers had assembled at the Market Square and as the news spread some booing and stone-throwing ensued.

Robert Haviland watched the seething mass from a window of the conference room. The strikers were growing in numbers and becoming more restless and agitated with the passing moments. The cleric did not require to be told that an ominous situation was developing and one which, unless adroitly handled, might easily prove of extreme gravity. John Howarth stepped over to his side. A stone-thrower in the crowd caught sight of the quarryowner, and shattered the pane into a thousand fragments.

"Ha! Ha!" he laughed, "your poor oppressed workingmen, your law-abiding operatives, what think you of them now, Haviland?"

The cleric stepped back for safety as a fusillade of stones beat upon the windows. He scorned to answer the other's taunts and passed on. But Howarth was not to be so lightly disposed of.

"These men," he sneered, "have selected you from all the county to represent them at the conference table, which means, or should mean—unless they are even more ignorant than I take them to be—that you have some sort of influence over them. In view of the disorder they are creating, it might not be inopportune for you to go out and exhort them to behave themselves before we are forced into the necessity of making them behave."

Haviland turned upon the quarryowner.


"Sir," he said gravely, "the onus of any trouble must rest greatly with yourself since you helped to scorn reason in the matter of finding a way out of these dif-

ficulties. It is not too late for you to signify your willingness to help forward an early settlement and I am sure, such news would do more to disperse any evil-intent in yonder crowd than any persuasion of mine."

"Bah!" replied Howarth, "these folks must be taught that law and order can and will be enforced. I would no more think of allowing myself to be influenced by stone-throwing and rioting than of becoming the president of their damned union. Since you are apparently afraid to do so, I will try my hand at dispersing the mob." And so saying he passed into the street where a force of police was keeping the crowd from rushing the Town Hall steps.

It was an amazing scene that greeted his eye as he stepped into the open. Thousands of strikers were pressing forward eagerly. On the shoulders of some of their number the Openmarsh gipsy, Jew Boy Jo, loudly harrangued them, and as he called the names of the arbitrators in order, booing, curses, groans and cheers followed according to the attitude of the crowd towards the members of the Board. Howarth appeared just as his own name was being called and a frantic demonstration of hate ensued. When the din had died, Jo, sighting the quarryowner, added a foul epithet of his own, and this so infuriated Howarth that he ordered the police to arrest the gipsy.

This they accomplished with great difficulty and having him securely under lock and key in the Town Hall they attempted the vain task of dispersing what was now more than a crowd—a seething mob of frenzied humanity that seemed to arm itself with all manner of weapons—bars of iron, sticks, palisading, spikes, garden tools and paving stones, in an incredibly short space of time. Their objective was the Town Hall building itself, for they pressed forward sweeping the policemen from their posts with great ease and fighting their way



up the broad steps to the great doors that had been hastily closed against them. A baton charge by the police ended disastrously for that body, and when the Mayor attempted to read the riot act from the Hall balcony, a climber struck him down with his staff. The next moment the Mayor's assailant himself fell bleeding into the crowd below, as the Mayor's sergeant clubbed him with the great mace.

The sight of blood urged the crowd to greater violence. Sterner attacks were made upon the Town Hall and after a battering the great doors yielded and the crowds rushed forward smashing and tearing, looting and bearing devastation everywhere impelled by rage and blind revengeful passion.

The Mayor and his aldermen had made a hurried exit at the rear of the building and with them had carried John Howarth, protesting vigorously. Haviland and some others were less fortunate and the mob captured them within the Conference Room, whither they had fled for safety—at the first inrush.

The cleric vainly tried to prevail upon the ringleaders to desist in their mad escapade, but they paid his words scant attention. The rest of the party was roughly jostled into the street, but Haviland they treated with more respect. He had championed their cause, and although beset by ill-health had been assiduous in his attempts to adjust the differences of master and man. He had unhesitatingly accepted a disagreeable task, the subsequent futility of which could no wise be laid at his door, and some lingering regard for Haviland manifested itself in the action of the passionate mob in assuring him of safety and offering him the means of escape.

Of this he did not readily avail himself; he was quick to see that he had some sort of influence—however small—over this seething mob, and forgetting

the frailness of his body, ignoring the possibility of injury, he asked to be allowed to address the men from the Town Hall steps. His request being granted, the ringleaders escorted him to the open and asked for silence. A hush fell upon the crowd as Haviland, seated upon the shoulders of two stalwart clothworkers the better to command the attention of the assemblage swayed to and fro above the dense mass, a picturesquely tragic figure, animated by a divine fire, his calm, deep voice pleading with them not to let their passions override their better judgments and to disperse peaceably so that any chances of a speedy settlement of the vexed question may not be jeopardised.

For a while it appeared as though the cleric would succeed in his self-appointed task, and it is highly probable he would have done, but for a singularly unfortunate occurrence.

It will be remembered that Howarth had secured the arrest of the Openmarsh gipsy for his prominence in the stone throwing at an early stage in the disturbance. The invaders of the Town Hall had set the gipsy free again, and seizing the Mayoral robes dressed him therein and carried him into the Square in the midst of Robert Haviland's exhortations. Instantly the action stirred the popular imagination; cheers and laughter drowned the cleric's words, stone-throwing recommenced and a section of the mob raided a public house and possessing themselves of its contents, set fire to the building. A missile hit the Rector full in the forehead; weak and exhausted he slipped from the shoulders of the clothworkers to the Town Hall steps, being buffeted about by the crowd like a helpless shuttlecock or a cork borne on the bosom of a full tide.

Suddenly flames burst from the Town Hall; spreading anon to adjacent buildings; shops were looted of their contents, hotels raided for liquor, fights were fre-

quent; everywhere the crowd surged it carried destruction and riot with it. Above all the tumult, Jew Boy Jo, in the Mayoral robes was paraded shoulder high, escorted by a squad of drunken youths dressed in the most grotesque garments they could tear from the draper's windows.

Suddenly a cry went up—"The Red Coats!" as a Company of infantry marched up the street converging on the Town Hall and commenced the arduous task of clearing the Square.

Some ugly rushes were made at the "intruders" and the Colonel in charge ordered his men to fire three volleys over the heads of the crowd as a warning to them to disperse quickly.

The firing had the effect of tempering the resistance of the civilians, and they commenced to retreat steadily. From four points the infantry pressed their way into the solid mass, splitting it so effectively as to make any further unified action impossible. However one section suffering from an excess of zeal, attempted too vigorously to press home its advantage. A rush was made at them and the crude weapons of the civilians created such havoc in the soldiers' ranks that the non-commissioned officer in charge shouted the order to fire point blank. Fortunately at that moment the roof of the burning Town Hall crashed, and the command was not heard by the men, who retired before the determined onslaught of the civilians.

But more and more infantry poured into the town, and the resistance of the civilians was finally broken. A Gordon was thrown about the town, making it difficult for anyone to leave or to enter without the knowledge of the military.

The market square came to resemble an armed camp, whilst up at the mills strong military pickets stood guard over the buildings, and groups of soldiers patrol-



led the streets breaking up every attempt of the rioters to re-assemble, and, where possible, forcing them to remain indoors.

And on such a scene night descended. A little tact, a little less strong-headedness might have prevented it all. A spark had been wilfully struck; it had been allowed to break into flame, the scared marks of which would be ineffaceable in the lifetimes of the dwellers of Kingsnorton, "a pretty town, full fine...enrolled and shryned in each good breast and every manly mynd."

## CHAPTER TEN

The millworkers' choosing of Robert Haviland as their representative at the conference table had come as a mild surprise, not only to the general public, but also to the Rector himself. He had regarded it as a high compliment and never for a moment shrunk from what he considered his duty in the matter.

The operatives had chosen him to champion their cause not by reason of any open avowal on his part, but because of his known integrity and proved uprightness of character. They knew they could depend upon him to argue their case reasonably, to combat any attempt to inflict injustice and to stand up fearlessly for a fair and right judgment.

Howarth had been ranged on the opposite side on account of his material interests in the mills—which were considerable—together with his reputation of bitter opposition to the workingman.

The millmasters knew that whilst Howarth sat at the conference table their interests were safe; he would consent to no ruling that would re-act upon them, and his choice had been made with unanimous approval.

When Robert Haviland recovered from the hurt that had caused him to fall from the shoulders of his escort on the Town Hall steps, he found himself in the basement of a cobbler's shop in Mercers lane, a narrow turning off the Market Square. The shop was, apparently, serving the rioters as a hospital—or rather as a place of protection for their wounded—for lamed and bleeding men lay on the floor or propped themselves painfully against the walls.

No one appeared to be in charge, the injured seemed to have been dumped down and left to take care of

themselves, and as the cleric moved to the door, he was not challenged. A great racket was going on in the lane outside, where some half-drunken strikers were piling furniture and bedding onto a large fire in the roadway. A man—evidently the owner—was appealing to them to stop, but they only laughed at him and threatened to dump him on the fire with his goods if he did not hold his tongue.

"Keep back man! Thee'll scorchi theeself," they warned him as he flung himself at his belongings in an endeavour to rescue them from the flames. He retired reluctantly as a tongue of fire licked him greedily.

"Ha! ha!" roared one of the rioters, "thees't a pretty pictur' now, Simon, wi' thee whiskers singed; never before did I see a bald faced Jew!"

Robert Haviland stepped forward to a group who appeared to be the ringleaders of the gang.

"Why is this man being treated in this fashion? what has he done?" he demanded.

The quiet, determined tone took them aback. They eyed Haviland critically; in this dishevelled, blood covered questioner they failed to recognize their mediator of a few hours previously.

"Who b'st thee to bide an' ask questions? If thee must know, Simon, the Jew, here, do know wheer Wicked Jack be hid—an' he mun tell us or bide the consequences."

"But he assures you he does not know: hear him; can you doubt such eloquence?"

Simon had fallen to his knees before the men and was busily engaged invoking all the prophets of whom Josephus was cognisant to bear witness of the truth of his denials.

"Bah!" they chorused, "Simon is the biggest liar since Ananias. Give him a lick o' th' fire and mak' him tell what he do know!"

They seized the Jew by the shoulders and held him within reach of the flames. The poor man uttered the most fiendish shrieks of anguish and Haviland rushing forward, threw himself bodily upon the torturers in an attempt at rescue. Rough hands seized him before he could effect his purpose; the Jew was pushed into the flames among his blazing chattels and the men scampered off as the cry "Wicked Jack! Wicked Jack is here!" issued from a house across the way.

Haviland dragged the bundle of terrified humanity from the flames and stripped it of the burning clothing. He bore the Jew to the nearest shop and revived him sufficiently to enable him to walk about. Fearing for the future safety of his charge, Haviland looked about for a likely hiding place for him. A wine merchant's store stood on the corner and knowing the place would contain vaults, directed Simon to it, impressing upon him the need of great haste. He could have spared himself the trouble of this—the half demented Jew ran off as fast as his legs would carry him.

No sooner had he gone when Howarth rushed into the street from one of the houses; save for Haviland the lane was deserted—all were indoors searching for the quarryowner, whom they knew to be hiding in the neighborhood. Howarth paused, panting like a hunted thing. he was strong but he had the sense to realise that the strongest man is powerless against overwhelming numbers—and as complete escape from the vicinity was impossible, he sought the next best thing—a good hiding place.

Haviland sensed his eager quest. "Follow the Jew," he called, "get to the Vaults: they are strong and safe. Quick man, ere you are seen!"

The quarryowner rushed off and disappeared into the wine cellars, a moment later the lane was filled with howling men frantically vowing to have the quarry.

man's blood. The mob swept past Haviland, some searching the houses to the right and left, some remaining behind to consume the stores of liquor taken from a hostelry. When the cry of "Redcoats!" went up, the cleric was forced into the market Square in the onrush to be carried whithersoever the crowd surged helpless to resist.

When eventually he did escape from the throng, he sought refuge at the house of a friend at the western end of the town, infinitely wearied by his strange experiences and profoundly sick at heart at the lamentable display of passion of which he had been an unwilling witness.

An hour after sunset on this sad day, Jo, the Open-marsh gipsy sought the kitchen door of the Eastern wing of Combe Dayrell Manor. He had in some way best known to himself, escaped the military cordon, and made his way here with the memory of his triumph in Kingsnorton still fresh.

But there was nothing of hero-worship in Elspeth's greeting as she answered his knocks.

"So thee b'st comed hwome at last, good-for-nought! Ah! thee do know wheer to come when thee b'st hungry."

Jo crossed the spacious kitchen and seated himself in the ingle nook of the broad hearth, stretching out his rain-sodden limbs to the cheerful blaze. He could afford to ignore Elspeth's jeers, for ever since his meeting with Anna in the church, the latter had taken a certain amount of interest in the vagabond and had allowed him access to the Manor kitchen. But Elspeth did not share her mistress' partiality for Jo, and when he lifted the lid of a steaming saucepan inquisitively, she swooped down heavily upon him.

"Tak that! meddlesome!" she exclaimed, dealing him a hearty clout that caused him to reel across the floor,

"If other folk be aisy wi' 'ee I baint g'wan to be!"

She clumped ponderously after him as he slunk to a corner of the room.

"If thee dussn't cast thee coat, man, I'll skin thee alive; 'tis drippen water in pools; and thees't brought in half the parish on thee boots!"

She returned to her work and a long silence ensued. The crestfallen gipsy sniffed the savory air deliciously, and being unable longer to curb his hunger, pleaded humbly.

"Do 'ee get I a bite Elspeth—I be famished!"

The woman turned sharply on her heel and from the sheer suzerainty of her great height looked down on him scornfully.

"And theer be they whom done honest work this day who be famished too," she replied, "who b'st thee, pray, that I should bide an' wait on at a moment's notice? No; get thee bite wheer thes't fed these many days!"

The gipsy smiled wanly.

"'Tis but poor fare they do serve on th' hill. They do keep a body's spirit low by starving his stummick!"

"Pears to me poor fare be better 'n no fare—for Ill see thee in the bottomless pit afore a morsel thee do get from I."

"My stummick do fairly groan for a taste," Jo pleaded again.

Elspeth moved to serve him and he watched her movements eagerly.

"Come y-here good-for-nought; thees't dussn't deserve it, but as all the Lord's creatures need for to be fed, I suppose the devil's brood be likewise fixed. But if thees' any decency about thee, do'ee thank the Lord who do feed all things."

The gipsy needed no second bidding and after making an effort at saying grace, set about to allay his hunger with a right good will.

So excellently did he behave that the woman relented insofar as to award him a second helping of the breast of mutton stew that had assailed his sense of smell so tantalizingly.

His meal over, he sat down in the ingle nook in great contentment, adroitly rolling a cigarette.

News of the trouble in Kingsnorton had not yet been carried to the Manor, and although Elspeth continually commented on the lateness of the labourers in coming home, Jo did not breathe a word of what he knew or offer a suggestion as to their absence.

Presently he took from about his waist the heavy Mayor's Chain of Office that he had captured in Kingsnorton.

Elspeth eyed it curiously.

"What fool's bauble hast thee got there?" she asked.

"Fool's bauble! Ha! Ha!" The gipsy's white teeth gleamed as he laughed aloud, "Jack Coomber 'ud lodge thee on th' hill for contempt o' authority if he did hear thee call 't a fool's bauble!"

"Jack Coomber?"

"Ay; 'tis his necklet."

"Not Mayor Coomber's o' 'Norten?"

The gipsy nodded.

"What's thee been at; burgling again?"

"What hasn't thee heerd o' th' row, 'Norten way?"

"Lord; no!"

"'Twas a fine set to; the crowd an' police did fight an' th' redcoats were called out."

"And thee?"

"They did robe I Mayor o' 'Norten—'twas fine sport—leastways 'till th' redcoats did come."

"Thee was't in th' thick o' it, I be bound: hassn't any hurt on 'ee?"

"Little enow!"

He opened his shirt at the breast and displayed a raw bayonet thrust about which the blood had congealed.

Elspeth's screams of alarm brought the whole of the occupants of the Eastern wing into the kitchen; the news swiftly spread to the Mistress of the Manor. She immediately made herself acquainted with the cause of the disturbance and disheveled and unkempt, the gipsy was ushered into her room much against his free-will.

Seen together, no greater contrast between two persons could be imagined. Anna was the taller of the two, the gipsy dark featured and sullen, the woman fair and pleasant. She was perfectly at her ease, but the gipsy nervously shifted his feet and traced a toe across the pattern of the carpet, the while he related his version of the events of the day.

Anna's brow clouded in spite of herself.

"And your wounds?" she asked.

"Thèy be nought!" he replied evasively.

"Nevertheless I shall insist upon Dr. Earnshaw seeing you."

The gipsy scowled.

"I cussn't bide in bed, mistress. I would grow corns on my back!"

"We must risk that! As to the chain I will see that it is restored to the authorities; you were foolish to take it away. Why do you do these things Jo? surely you must know you will be found out sooner or later and punished. The millworkers' quarrel was no concern of yours."

"'Twas as much my concern as any other body's. Wicked Jack, were ringleader o' the maister's, so I did make myself ringleader o' th' men."



His eyes dropped to the Mayoral Chain the woman held in her hands.

"Thee do mean to keep it? he asked.

"Surely"

The gipsy watched her move towards a cabinet and unlock it. He had fought hard and long for possession of the prize. A swift movement brought him beside Anna and he roughly grasped her arm.

"'Tis mine! I did fight the redcoats for it, and did leave three o' them in the gutter o' the High Street!"

Before the woman could reply he had snatched the chain from her hand and rushed from the apartment, making good his escape from the house, to concern himself in whatever mischief might be going forward.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

The day following the disturbances at Kingsnorton, dawned quietly enough. After the day and night of terror, the town lay as though paralysed by the misfortune that had suddenly overtaken it.

From an early hour military re-inforcements had poured into the town and so tight a grip on the situation did the authorities maintain that up to mid-day hardly any trouble had been experienced in breaking up the attempts of the millworkers to congregate.

The main streets of the town, together with the Market Square presented a sorry sight. Partly-burned shops, their doors and windows battered in, their contents strewn the roadway, lined the streets. The Town Hall was an empty smouldering shell; the Law Courts had its every window smashed, banks, inns, shops and private dwellings all bore fearful testimony to the violence of the mob.

During the night the more prominent citizens had sought refuge in the Barracks, among them several of the millowners; under cover of night John Howarth had crawled from his hiding place and sought refuge, of all places, at the prison.

From there a squad of soldiers had escorted him out of the town, and borrowing a horse he hummed a tune as he rode towards home, as though riots were everyday happenings.

He turned up the collar of his greatcoat as the drizzle that had fallen from the leaden sky at intervals developed into a steady downpour.

At the "Cardinal Wolsey" a bright, wood fire burned merrily behind the crimson curtains, inviting the

traveller to forsake the cheerless outside world for the warm, cheery inn. He was not invulnerable to its appeal and with a fine disregard for the inn's best parlour, shook the rain from his greatcoat.

"'Twas lucky I had this with me," he remarked, "for 'twas fine enough when I started out; the weather is breaking; 'tis very unsettled."

"It be no worse than the times," replied the Innkeeper, crossly, "'pears to me there be a peck o' trouble in store for these parts. What be the news 'Norten way?"

"No more than what I suppose you already know. You heard of the disturbances there?"

"Ay; 'tis the talk o' th' place. Jew Boy Jo wi' th' Mayor's Chain did come to the Manor and spread th' news. 'Tis said the redcoats did fire on the crowd."

"Nothing of the kind—the more's the pity. A volley or two and a couple of the ringleaders clapped in gaol, and the affair would have been nipped in the bud."

"Th' doctrine of force be all wrong," said the Innkeeper, "'Twould only mak' th' men more stubborn."

"'Tis the only thing to do with this Socialist malady that seems to have gripped England—nay, 'tis not a malady but a malignant disease that infects every weak intellect that has anything to do with it."

"Ay; thees't right theer, sir; for since you Socialist chaps went forth to sow hereabouts not all their seed did fall on stony ground. 'Norten be not the only place wheer trouble be brewin."

"I know; and am quite prepared to deal with anything that comes my way."

"Folks do know that, sir!" commented Mallard viciously.

"All the same, I'll have it understood that no parcel of cut-throats shall run my affairs. I have always acted according to my wishes and no dirty Socialist princi-

ples shall be dictated to me. Only let the mouthy gang be caught preaching their pernicious doctrine of divine discontent in my parish—a ducking will be the least of their rewards."

Mallard shook his head ponderously.

"'Twould be a sorry land if th' right to free speech were to go!" he said.

"You seem very warm in their defense, Mallard. If you entertain them as heartily, I shall no longer have to wonder at their partiality to these parts. Ho! ho! what discoveries I am making!"

"Thees't makin' no discoveries, Howarth, but only putting theeself out o' temper for nought! I be not defendin' them but speak only as to my mind seems right. Yon Socialist chaps be talked about in my house—but only in a casual like way, as a body talks about bees an' th' weather. Martha and I conduct this house according to law at all times, and they who say otherwise do lie!"

A peal of ribald laughter from the direction of the tap-room challenged the statement.

Howarth pricked up his ears.

"Hallo—what's going forward?" he asked.

"'Tis nought but Dawkins and the men at the quarries!"

The innkeeper hastily moved towards the door with the obvious intention of imposing silence upon the noisy party, but Howarth motioned him back.

"What the devil are they doing here?" he asked, "'tis barely three o'clock."

"'Tis some dispute they have," answered Mallard, awkwardly, "I can't mak' out rightly what do ail them—they be all talking at once. But Dawkins he do say they-m left the quarry till waiges be paid same as Combe Dayrell men gets."

Howarth's brow darkened. A fortnight previously he had been approached by Dawkins with reference to the extra half-penny an hour, but he had sent the foreman about his business very promptly. Evidently, exaggerated accounts of the Kingsnorton occurrence had fired the men's dull imaginations and prompted this action.

Howarth knew by long experience, the determined character of his employees, and instinctively squared his jaw. To attempt to avoid conflict by conciliation did not occur to him. He must struggle—always struggle—it was his nature so to do—and shew these men they could not throw down the gauntlet with impunity. Following so swiftly upon the events at Kingsnorton this new trouble was doubly annoying, and he turned to the Innkeeper, savagely:

"So this is the proper and lawful manner in which you conduct your house—by lending it to such meetings! I have a mind to make an appointment with you for the first Monday in February at Kingsnorton Brewster Sessions—the licensing justices would be interested in your playing host to a parcel of insurrectionists."

"'Tis nought to me," replied Mallard crossly, "I be an innkeeper and mun keep my house open to all and sundry by law. So long as they be sober and speak no ill of God nor king, 'tis no business of mine!"

"Very well; we shall see. Leave me here; I want to see what's going forward. Do not let them know by word or sign I am here. You understand?"

The innkeeper was only too glad to escape. Although he hated Howarth, he feared him also, and sincerely hoped the noisy crowd would either go or curb their tongues.

Contrary to Mallard's hopes, the quarrymen showed no disposition to quietude, and as Howarth peeped through the curtain of the window that communicated

with the tap room he drew a deep breath of amazement.

The room was filled with labourers in their quarry clothes of yellow fustian. Half a dozen were trying to speak at once ignoring the appeal of Dawkins the foreman for order. Others smoked or drank or lounged at the bar or around tables in various stages of intoxication.

With a sharp rat! tat! on the table for order, Dawkins, at length, managed to impose some sort of silence.

"Order for Reuben Livingstone!" he bellowed.

Reuben cleared his throat before he began.

"Pears to me, we-m all wandering away from the subject matter," he said, by way of introduction. Reuben dearly loved to mystify the rustics with high sounding words, the meaning of which, he himself only had a hazy knowledge. On the syllables of such words he loved to dwell and along with them would inject into his speech legal and official phraseology that, however ridiculous, never failed to impress the countrymen.

Looking for all the world like a Triton among the minnows, he continued.

"To epit-omise all the arguments that have gone forward; what we do want is equal pay for equal work that Combe quarries be paying, namely fourpence-ha'penny per hour for fifty hours per week. This we mun have—this we will have, for Jacky mun give into we if we refuse to dig th' stone! To this end a deppy-tation we mun have."

The rustics remained silent lest some sound of theirs should break the thread of oratory that Reuben weaved. He refreshed himself from a quart pot.

"Ay; 'tis a deppy-tation with a pol-icy—and th' crux o' th' pol-icy mun be no com-prom-ise."

Everyone approved, although they knew no more what Reuben meant than the man in the moon.

"This y-here extra ha'penny per hour is g'wan to be

ours, and the deppy-tation mun see that we do get it. But a deppytation mun have a leader and a spokesman. Everything do depend on how th' case be presented."

This difficulty momentarily damped the ardour of the company, until one labourer spokè up:—

"Micky Jason 'll be spokesman, he have th' gift o' th' gab."

"Oh; have he?" retorted Micky indignantly, "Mebee he have—an' mebee he have th' gift o' his knuckles too, Jonathan Loveday."

But a dozen voices had caught up the cry and Micky stood in imminent peril of being elected spokesman. He vigorously protested.

"Pears to me yon's a matter for lots to be drawn on!"

The others were not so sure; lot drawing was a hazardous business—the unpleasant task might fall upon any of them.

The necessity of a spokesman killed the deputation idea, but the ubiquitous Reuben had another suggestion ready.

"There still be a alternative," he said, "there still be the round robin."

A dead silence followed the announcement.

"Ay; the round robin. You see, we do put down our claims on paper so—," he traced a square among the ale slops with his pipe and drew a ring around it, "and in the circle we do put our names. In this way they be following on like and Jacky can't say this 'un or that 'un leads the way, for there b'aint no start or finish. Oh! 'tis a excellent idea the round robin."

When he had convinced his audience of the merits of the round robin, Jason Dawkins and George Meeks, an ex-parish clerk were deputed to draw up the quarry-men's charter around which the men were to sign their names.

After considerable cudgelling of brains, and after many deletions and additions, the trio evolved the following document:—

"ROUND ROBBIN"

"Notice is hereby given J. Howarth, that this meeting of workers in the Openmarsh quarries requires payment hereafter of 4 ½ d. per hour for 50 hours per week. same being paid in Combe Dayrell quarries.

"And further, we give notice that if a refusal is granted no stone will be dug from the quarries and a policy enforced.

"Wherefore the aforesaid quarryworkers have put their signatures or made their marks according to their several abilities, in a round robbin."

The labourers crowded round the table to sign, and when they had finished with the document, their crude pot hooks gave it a more grotesque appearance than Sennacherib's six-sided cylinder.

The next business is to de-liver it," said Reuben, "an' I do propose we do all ad-journ in a body to th' Lodge and de-liver it to Jacky himself."

A chorus of "ayes" ratified this, and the company finished off their ale, when Howarth himself entered the room.

The quarryowner's appearance seemed to strike the company dumb with astonishment. Striding up to Dawkins he demanded:—

"Why the devil arent you at work? What low down game are you playing now Dawkins?"

"Tis no low game," he replied, "we be struck for a increase in wages. 'Tis here for 'ee to read."

Howarth snatched the proffered paper, with scarcely a glance at it he tore it across and trod the pieces on the sanded floor.



"Now; I'll give you all two minutes to clear off these premises, and any man who is not back at the quarries in half-an-hour can consider himself discharged."

The labourers looked sheepishly about them, hardly able to comprehend the unfortunate turn things had taken.

"It be only fair play we do seek," ventured Micky Jason.

"What be the good o' seekin' fair play from a Howarth—'tis more than was ever got from any o' th' bad brood, least of all Jacky."

Howarth glanced in the direction of the speaker. His glance changed to a scowl as he recognized the Open-marsh gipsy.

"Hold your tongue you black-skinned mongrel," he hissed, "'tis none of your business—the sooner you are lodged in Kingsnorton gaol the better t'will be for the countryside. You won't be happy until you dance at the end of the hangman's rope."

"I'd dance th' rope, an' wi' glee for killin' th' likes o' thee."

Jo would have said more had not a blow from Howarth's clenched fist closed his mouth. In a twinkling he had leapt at his assailant's throat; there was a scuffle, other labourers cleared a space as the two men rolled over on the floor overturning tables and scattering glasses and mugs in all directions.

The huge innkeeper attempted to intervene but was held off. As the struggle continued the quarrymen became roused; some of the more highly intoxicated began helping themselves to liquor, and in trying to protect his property Mallard was felled with a blow and left to wallow in the steady stream of his own ale that flowed from two huge casks with the bung holes knocked out. His good dame ran screaming to the vil-



lage scared out of her wits by the violence of the labourers.

Howarth and Jo struggled desperately. The former hed a great cut over the left eye from which blood flowed profusely. Jo clung to him with wiry tenacity, attempting every wile to throw his man, all without result. It was plain that he could not last much longer against the quarryowner's great strength, and his despair was apparent when, on Howarth's releasing him he drew a clasp knife with which to defend himself. In a sudden access of fury Howarth caught him up and seizing his throat held him until blood and foam appeared at his mouth. He then flung him, limp and inert, among his companions.

Instantly a couple of labourers closed in upon their master. He avoided them, but others folloowed their example and forced him to fight. This he did quite heartily, until forced to the ground by overwhelming numbers. By this time the labourers were desperate, and with murder in their hearts they attacked the fallen quarryowner. At last the tables were turned; vengeance was theirs at last, and no mercy would they show—Howarth must die.

An die he most assuredly would have done but for the presence of mind of Ruth Dimblebee.

The innkeeper's wife had roused the Manor with her story of the row at the inn. Ruth saw it was a case for diplomacy or cunning and knowing nothing of the former quality she chose the latter. Breaking in upon the struggling men she cried aloud "The Redcoats! The Red Coats! they are in the village!"

Her cry had instant effect. The quarrymen swarmed the inn tool-house and arming themselves therefrom dashed towards the village to eject the fictitious invaders.

Meanwhile, Parkes, the hostler, had seized the opportunity to drag the unconscious Howarth into the inn gig, and taking the precaution to revive the inn-keeper sufficiently that he might be able to defend his wife and property from further attacks, drove off hot foot to Wichenden Lodge. There the household was mobilized in the event of an attack, and the police at Kingsnorton appraised of the occurrences. Precautionary measures were swiftly taken to prevent a further spreading of the lawlessness which had gripped the countryside within the space of a few brief hours.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

Winter had already begun to lay her chill clutch upon the glories of Autumn, and Nature's warm russets and browns were sobering to the drab monotone associated with this time of the year. The oaks and elms shorn of their grandeur, clashed their naked limbs as a dismal wind swept through them, driving some murky flakes of snow before it.

And as she watched the cheerless scene from the embrasure at the window, Anna almost wished herself back in her western home, where dull days are few and in the coldest weather the sun shines with cheery brightness.

Robert Haviland stood at her side and her half turned shoulder suggested they were debating some subject that was distasteful to the Mistress of the Manor.

"You have acted very unwisely," he was saying, "and surely you will not add to your folly by keeping the gipsy here."

"Anyone else would have acted the same. How could I turn the man from my door in his condition? Dr. Earnshaw says that in addition to the bayonet wound the collar bone has been dislocated and some ribs smashed. One of these has pierced the right lung and unless the haemorrhage is allayed within the next twelve hours, he will abandon hope of Jo's recovery. surely you would not have me hand the man over to the police in such a state?"

"I did not know Jo's injuries were so serious, and am sorry if I seemed harsh towards you; but the gipsy has the reputation of bringing trouble upon anyone who befriends him and I was anxious. It is an indictable offence to harbour a fugitive from justice."

"I know—if one is found out. As things are, the presence of Jo here is known only to Dr. Earnshaw, Elspeth and Ruth, besides ourselves. I have enjoined each one of this trio to secrecy and know I can rest assured of their loyalty."

Their conversation changed to trivial matters; many times the Rector would have departed, but Anna seemed to wish him to stay and repeatedly checkmated his efforts to leave.

Finally he grasped his hat and made for the door. Anna followed him and as his hand closed on the handle, she placed herself boldly before him.

"Robert Haviland," she said in an injured tone of which he could not comprehend the cause, "what am I to you?"

The Rector was taken aback by the directness of the query.

"My very dear friend," he replied warmly.

"If that is so, I expect you to honour me with your confidence. Why must you leave me to find out everything through the medium of rumours? Come; tell me if it is true you have been summoned for taking part in the Kingsnorton riots."

"Yes; it is quite true. From what I can gather the police have issued me a summons following information lodged by John Howarth. The charge 'inciting to riot'—is such an absurd one that I have not thought very much about it yet, and I did not wish to bother you with it."

"Dear Robert," she replied, "if I am to be more than a mere companion, you must give me your confidence—I am strong and can bear the weight of trouble. Please confide in me, so that I can share your burdens, just as you share mine. How else can I hope to be your friend?"

Haviland bent over the girl as he took up her hands.

"Anna," he whispered, "it is said that friendship ends where love begins; if that be true I can no longer be counted your friend for I love you very dearly. You are very precious to me—each ringlet of your hair, each smile from your lips, each and every part of your mortal self; but most of all I love you for your woman's heart."

"I am proud and glad to have the love of so good a man," replied Anna, "I trust I may never prove unworthy of it."

"It is unthinkable," he answered.

As she watched the Rector walk down the drive, Anna's heart beat joyously. The day that before seemed gloomy blossomed forth into new brightness. Haviland's avowal had made her happy. She was under no delusion as to the love of which he spoke, knowing it was neither amorous passion, nor possession-seeking sentimentalism, but rather that order of love through being compelled to love. Some analysts would doubtless deny to this condition the right of being classified under the term "love," and we would be content to substitute "intense admiration" if more meaning could be imparted to the verb.

Anna assured herself that the disparity between their ages was an ever present chaperon that made it almost impossible for them to advance beyond a certain point, but nevertheless she was delighted at the Rector's words. Many times she repeated them to herself until she knew them by heart.

Ruth found her mistress seated with her elbows upon a shovel-board table, dreaming and scheming—a dangerous occupation in the light of what had happened an hour previously.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Peace reigned again in the Avon valley. After a prolonged ~~strike~~ the clothworkers at Kingsnorton had returned to work being practically starved into submission. From the men's point of view the affair had proved a ghastly failure, for they could point to nothing gained by the strike. They had returned to work dissatisfied and sullen, and if the millowners thought their victory had been complete they were deceiving themselves, for the men organized their union with greater avidity and the fires of rebellion only smouldered menacingly.

With a relentlessness that disconcerted not only his brother employers but the police themselves, John Howarth hounded down the principal actors in the drama.

He caused the ringleaders to be arrested; amassed a volume of evidence and secured charges against them of sedition, rioting, inciting violence, robbery and incendiarism. Some were lodged in gaol and others liberated on bail according to the gravity of the charges against them. Among the latter was Robert Haviland. The magistrates would have accepted the Rector's explanation and thrown out the charge against him had not Howarth insisted upon his case going to trial. With nothing to fear whilst facing a jury, Haviland did not resist the decision, rather welcoming the opportunity of publicly explaining his actions and motives on the day of the riots.

In the affair of the Openmarsh quarrymen, Howarth had acted even more swiftly and relentlessly. Dawkins, Jason, Livingstone, Loveday and Meeks were all clapped in gaol. The quarries were closed down and had so remained. What this meant to the village of Openmarsh none but the villagers themselves knew. The

winter was fast approaching and tales were coming through of intense suffering. Some of the more enterprising workmen took their families into the town, but work had fallen off there, and they only swelled the ever growing army of unemployed. The Combe Dayrell quarries absorbed many of the men, and others found work on the farms, but even so between eighty and ninety quarrymen remained idle. It seemed that the village of Openmarsh must become an empty shell for quarrying was the sole occupation of its inhabitants.

All appeals to Howarth to reinstate the men, both from public and private sources, had failed. It seemed that the rough handling he had received from them had embittered him past forgiveness.

At every visit to the gipsy's sick chamber, Dr. Earnshaw informed Anna of some new case of pitiable poverty at Openmarsh, and although she did what she could to help, she knew that the re-starting of the quarries was the only solution to the problem.

As to the gipsy, he had lain, oblivious to care and solicitude, for weeks, when the dull flicker of life in the poor broken body, it seemed must finally go out. But Earnshaw had reported hopefully when hope seemed gone, and at length Jo had opened big wondering eyes in a struggle to regain consciousness of what was happening around him. It had been a long job, but the devotion of the doctor together with the care of the woman, Elspeth and Ruth was gradually restoring the gipsy back to health and to life of which he was such an ardent lover.

On this particular day, Earnshaw halted as he stepped across the hall of the Manor. He was a bright, youngish man, muscular, finely built; a man always busy and invariably happy. His smile was not so bright this morning.



"I have a job not much to my liking," he said as Anna returned his greeting, "a young quarryman at Openmarsh committed suicide last night and the discovery of his body was made by his aged mother. The poor soul has been so distracted by grief that the authorities have asked me to make a report as to her mental condition, preparatory I suppose, to removing her to an asylum."

"How dreadful," replied Anna, "there is a lot of suffering in Openmarsh, just now. It wrings one's heart to hear these things."

"Yes; I had to ship a family of nine over to the workhouse, yesterday. I do not remember having seen such poverty before. There was scarcely a crumb in the house to eat, and the whole family was in an advanced state of malnutrition. Yet they would not beg; and neighbors were unaware of their distress."

Half-an-hour later Anna stepped into her dog-cart and drove off in the direction of Wichenden. It was a cold, bright day of the kind that thrills one's veins pleasantly if you are well fed and well clothed, but nips you to the bone if you are hungry and poorly clad.

And as she drove through Openmarsh the pinched, wan faces of the villagers seemed to reproach her, yet they steeled her for the task she had set herself.

The splendid bay horse made good progress; his shoes rang pleasantly upon the hard road that steadily rose between high hedgerows to the Wichenden road. The first part of the descent into the village was precipitous, and whilst her horse picked its way carefully, Anna was able to note her surroundings.

The entrance to the village was extremely picturesque. The first building on the left was a forge, an old-fashioned building bearing a carved barge-board in its little dormer gable. The inn and many of the houses were of great antiquity, and nearby, the ivy clad church

was a fine old Tudor timber house with corner post and the original "bottle" glass windows.

Wichenden Lodge lay—a low built unpretentious structure at the Eastern extremity of the village.

Howarth sat in his study watching the sunset glow dully behind a belt of trees when Anna was ushered in. He rose immediately, and although undoubtedly he was astonished at her calling, he did not betray it by look or by word. They had not met since Howarth had introduced himself in the Minnowbrook meadow, and he could not divine her mission.

"I must first crave your pardon for invading the privacy of your home," she began, "and hope that you will be patient with me in the situation I have chosen to place myself." —

He smiled enigmatically. A shaft of red light slanted across him for a moment, and when it had gone he stood as grey and shadowy a figure as the misery he had provoked.

"Be assured, Miss Boulton; I know something of more than average import has prompted you to break tradition in the matter of coming here, and will promise you a good hearing. But pray be seated; so few people honour me with visits that I'm afraid my notions of etiquette are rather antiquated."

As he lit the candles on the sideboard and drew the heavy curtains across the window, Anna removed her driving coat and settled herself comfortably. The drive through the keen winter air had brought the glow of health to the fresh young cheeks and a bright sparkle to the beautiful eyes; she seemed to him more womanly than on the occasion of their other meeting, but still possessed of her youthful freshness. In the drab setting of his study her beauty shone adorably. She coloured ever so slightly as she felt his eyes fixed upon her in close scrutiny, but it was in a clear voice that she

broached the subject of her visit.

"I have come she said deliberately and without any wordy garnishing, "to plead the cause of the Open-marsh quarrymen."

Howarth leant back in his chair.

"A fruitless journey," he said simply, "nothing you may say can alter my present stand."

"But surely you cannot be aware of the awful consequences that are following your closing of the quarries. Come; let me drive you over to Openmarsh and shew you fifty—nay one hundred—poor creatures starving."

"My dear lady; has it never occurred to you that you share much of the responsibility for such a state of affairs?"

"I?" asked Anna in amazement.

"Yes; the Openmarsh men were quite content with the wage they were getting until you fixed the Combe Dayrell scale a halfpenny higher than theirs."

"But all through the west country—Bath, Frome, Glastonbury—the quarrymen's wage is fourpence-halfpenny an hour and in some places fivepence. When I fixed the scale at the Combe Dayrell quarries I only gave the men what was their due."

"However that may be, the fact remains that your scale disaffected my men. I cannot afford to pay the increase and the quarries will likely be closed until the Spring, and even then I may decide to close them permanently, as for years they have been run at a loss."

"Well as you seem to think I should shoulder some responsibility in this unfortunate matter, let me tell you I am willing to do so. For six months I will pay the difference between the old scale and the new at your quarries; nay, I will even go further for the sake of the unemployed, If you will restart the quarries at once I will subsidise any losses in six months working."

Howarth sat in silence for a long while before re-

plying. His brain was working fast, but it was characteristic of him that when he spoke his words did not betray his uppermost thoughts.

"What would the eminently practical Mr. Haviland say of such a suggestion?" he asked.

"Mr. Haviland feels this matter as keenly as I do myself. He would approve of any action that brought relief to these sufferers."

"My dear lady; your charity does you credit; but let me hasten to advise you against becoming charitably inclined towards these country-folk. I have lived among them all my life and find they have a nasty knack of laying good with evil."

"You are biased by reason of your own experiences, to which, if you stopped to think, you might find your own acts have contributed."

The man shrugged his shoulders.

"The Howarths were always unpopular—had I been the most charitably minded and easy-going person in the world, and had showered the people with kindnesses, it would still have been the same—they would have hated me."

"In the Palestine of the Jews it was a popular superstition that no good could come out of Samaria—yet Samaria produced the Messiah. Prove to these people that good can come out of a Howarth—end this intolerable situation."

They had risen to their feet and stood confronting one another.

"Do you realise" asked Howarth, "the full significance of your coming here—what it means to me? In it I see a disregard for the stupidities with which our fathers used to oppress themselves, for it was an old tradition that a Boulton had never crossed the threshold of a Howarth, and vice versa. Indeed, many years ago your great grandfather came to grief on a spirited mare

on yonder Marsh Hill and was picked up with a broken back. This Lodge was the nearest house, yet he stoutly declaimed against those who sought to bear him here and died under a hedge in a driving snowstorm."

"All of which emphasises my earnestness to get the matter settled."

"Acolus is still mine," he said significantly.

Anna reflected.

"As you have pointed out, my presence here is a partial answer to your query, and I will gladly take Acolus, if you will give me your assurance that the quarries will be restarted."

"You are aware of what the taking of Aeolus implies?"

"Yes; I could not allow any scruple of mine to nullify the chances of a settlement."

And so on the morrow the beautiful Arab was housed at the Manor stables.

## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Howarth did not seemingly allow Anna to forget the pledge of friendship she had made as the price of the restarting of the Openmarsl quarries. He had fulfilled his part of the bargain scrupulously, so scrupulously that no family in the village could complain of his treatment of them. Moreover, at the earnest request of Anna he had consented to pay the additional half-penny per hour that had originally caused the dispute. Whether by accident or by design he contrived to meet the Mistress of the Manor very frequently, until Anna felt it would be a relief to attend some function or to make some journey without bumping into the quarry-owner.

Not that he annoyed her. Quite often a nod or a single word would be the extent of his greeting, but she could not but feel instinctively that turn where she would Howarth was there, his steady eye so seemingly absorbed elsewhere, watching her every movement.

She reported her fears to Robert Haviland, who, knowing the nature of the quarryowner, or, rather, thinking he knew it—invited her to throw to the winds her suspicions. At the same time he saw what Anna did not herself realise, that the girl wielded a peculiar—but none the less potent—influence over the man. Several instances had occurred in which the obduracy of the quarryowner had been broken by Anna's intercession, and while the circumstance gave satisfaction to the cleric it also worried him not a little.

And as the days wore on, Haviland's eyes became opened to many things; keeping an alert look-out he became astounded at the things he saw. So alarmed was he at the course of events that he dare not consult Anna, lest his alarm communicate itself to her.

The accidental meetings between Howarth and Anna he knew to be deliberately engineered by the former; on the few occasions on which the trio had been together—Anna, Haviland and Howarth—the cleric saw unmistakable signs that the quarryowner nourished a passion that was rapidly growing in strength and which he could ill conceal.

Haviland decided to acquaint Anna with the state of affairs and with this object crossed over to the Manor one night in early November.

Anna received him in the Oak room, a long low room lined with carved oak horizontal beams with panelling between, except on one side which was covered from floor to ceiling and from wall to wall with a huge tapestry depicting the grove of Daphne. The furniture was all of black oak, and beneath the high mantelpiece great logs crackled on the open hearth.

Motioning him to a chair, Anna stood watching the fire meditatively; its glow fell full upon her seeming to clothe her with a mantle of fiery gold. Her perfectly moulded figure bent with the grace of a willow as she leaned against the mantelpiece; against its carved ogres her beautiful gold crowned head stood out clear and shapely; her eyes borrowed lustre from the flames; a faint tinge of warm blood painted the cream and roses of her cheek; her lips were redder than the glowing embers; her white arm gleamed brighter than the ivory candlebearers above; just a little dimple showed at her elbows.

And as he watched her he experienced a queer racing of the blood in his veins, a quickening of his pulses, a surging something in his breast. This was the woman whom he was about to virtually hand over to the quarryowner: beautiful, desirable and very worthy of the best love of earth's best man. The thought bewildered him; he tried to analyse it, to look at things through

their right perspective, but somehow he could not. His heart rebelled within him; he forgot his forty years of life, his grey hairs and his body made frail by disease—he was young again; superbly young—for where there is love the heart is never old.

All unconscious of the tumult into which she was plunging Haviland, Anna crossed over to him, and dropping into her favorite posture at his feet, took up his hand and trailed it about her shoulder.

"Dear Robert," she said, "you are very silent tonight. Is anything wrong?"

"If anything was right I would be glad;" he answered, "but everything seems in such a whirl, the world appears to have suddenly gone mad."

"I do not understand you; what has happened? you look as astonished as though you have witnessed a miracle."

"I have certainly witnessed nothing less," he answered with conviction. After a pause he added, "Anna; I have learned that you have an awful power within your grasp, a power amounting almost to entire domination over the life and actions of a very powerful man."

"If you refer to our neighbour Howarth you exaggerate. I have neither such power, nor the wish to acquire it; so pray allow me to plead innocent to your allegation."

"My child; you do not understand me, I said you have great power over a powerful man, and I know what of I speak. I do refer to Howarth, whose whole future lies in the hollow of your hand."

"Again I say you exaggerate. If your statement is the result of deductions from the few transactions in which I have been successful in persuading the quarryowner to take certain actions, you have deceived yourself greatly."



"It is anything but that. But do not purposely blind yourself to the fact that Howarth has conceived an ardent passion for you. It is patent to everyone who sees him in company with you."

"What can I do?"

"Can you reciprocate his affections?"

"I do not know. It has never occurred to me. Maybe if I avoided him for a spell, he will change his mind and forget me?"

"It is unlikely." After a pause he added bitterly, "when a man loves at forty it is no passing fancy that prompts his passion, but a very real and lasting affection."

"Then I must leave the neighborhood, so as not to inflict further pain upon him by my presence."

"My child, you are unused to the ways of the world. Know you not that in your absence his passion would burn all the stronger. Besides; it may be that fate has willed it so, and that you are to remain here to become through this means a power for good in the Avon Valley."

"If it is my duty to remain here and do this thing I will not shirk it. But dear Robert, I shall continue to lean upon you. You are so upright so sincere, so thoughtful and so faithful, I often wonder what I should have done without your help; you have made life so easy and so pleasant for me; you have been such a friend and such a companion, that I could not consent to anything that would part me from you. Oh! I could not! Do assure me that if, as you suggest, I am to be used as a medium through which God will reclaim this man—our friendship, aye our love—will not be affected by the change!"

She clung to him despairingly, as he gathered her in his arms. They were nearer a revelation of the true state of affairs than they had ever been before. But



Haviland, being a Christian minister, saw the hand of God in Howarth's falling in love with his charge. He saw that through the girl He would work one of the miracles with which we are all so familiar; that the transformation of Howarth from a blackguard and a scoundrel to a good, just man and its consequent wide effect all through the countryside, was to be effected at His bidding. He dare not attempt to interfere with the divine intent; he was human, but his human desires had been brought to subjection by a lifetime of piety and the practise of good works. And so when Anna's upturned face rested upon his breast, his impulse was to cover it with burning kisses, instead of which he pressed his lips to her brow, and murmured, "The Lord's will be done," and left the apartment.

At these words a light dawned upon Anna. She realised suddenly the sacrifice the cleric was making.

With yearning in her voice she called upon him to stop. But he had gone, and a mocking echo from the spacious hall was the only answer she got.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Something more than ordinary was obviously stirring in Combe Dayrell village. A knot of women were congregated outside the general store discussing something very excitedly.

As Mrs. Netherway appeared upon the scene, half a score of voices accosted her: "What do'ee think, Missus, a hunered pound reward for the takin' o' Jew Boy Jo."

Mrs. Netherway expressed incredulity, but they assured her a notice to that effect was posted up on Mallard's barn at the "Cardinal Wolsey." In that direction she made, followed by other women, all excited over the unusual occurrence. At the barn they found a group of labourers reading the notice, which was as follows:—

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£100 REWARD

The above sum will be paid to the person or persons giving information leading to the arrest of the person or persons responsible for the protection of Joseph Coverdale, better known as "Jew Boy Jo" of the parish of Openmarsh, wanted in connection with the Kingsnorton riots.

Apply in person to

JOHN HOWARTH

Wichenden Lodge.

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"Tak' that!" said a labourer aiming a clod of soft mud.

"An' that—an' that!" shouted half a score more until the notice was almost obliterated in a shower of mud.

The innkeeper peeped apprehensively over his parlour curtain. The memory of the fight at the "Cardinal" was still fresh.

"'Tis a insult to the whole neighborhood," said one of the women, "men, thees't not Avon folk if thee do bide an let yon old fool insult us. Mak' him tak' un down!"

The innkeeper's face disappeared as cries of "Come out Mallard; tak' un down, Toby," went up.

"'Pears to me he be wanting another ale bath," suggested another woman, "claw 'im out by the scruff o' his neck, th' girt windbag!"

As the cries became more insistent, Mallard appeared at the door.

"Come Maister innkeeper," said a rustic, "baiting th' countryside wi' blood money won't do! Up wi' thee. ladder an' rip un off sharp, or thees't in for a breach o' th' peace again!"

Mallard reluctantly placed the ladder against the barn and began to ascend it. He began to tear down the offending notice when one labourer aimed a juicy cake of mud at his bald pate so accurately that the blow caused him to lose his balance. As he toppled to the ground a fusilade of muddy missiles covered him from head to foot in slime and deciding that discretion was the better part of valour, he waddled indoors as fast as his legs could carry him.

"Now duck un in the pond and clean un!" suggested a woman, but her suggestion was fortunately for Mallard, not acted upon.

The news of the reward spread rapidly through the three parishes. Jo had so completely disappeared since the affray at the "Cardinal," that a good many people thought he was either dead or already in the hands of the police. But this offering of a reward for information as to his protectors showed that Howarth thought otherwise.

When Anna heard the news she made her way to the sick chamber. A dim lamp burned on a table and

threw its light across the bed wherein a shadowy pitiful thing, worn and wasted by intense suffering, lay.

As she felt that some sinister motive underlay the issuing of the notice a vague feeling of impending disaster oppressed her, and obeying a natural impulse she dropped to her knees in prayer.

An hour later she saddled Aeolus and was on her way to Wichenden Lodge, bent on learning from Howarth himself the cause of the notice and if necessary, interceding on behalf of the gipsy.

She had almost completed the five miles when Aeolus went lame and stopping to examine him she found the near hind shoe had worked loose. So she left him at the forge at the entrance of the village and completed the journey on foot.

At the entrance to the Lodge carriage way, she saw a figure move against the background of light from one of the windows. The figure turned facing her and she recognized Ruth Dimblebee. A man emerged from the French window and slinking in the shadow of the laurels he joined the girl and they passed off together by an unfrequented path.

It occurred to Anna that it might be better policy to first interview her maid, and that is why she rode home without seeing Howarth.

Ruth Dimblebee had abandoned her quest of "life." Her decision synchronized with her repudiation of Howarth, for the two were very much linked up. Her position at the Manor gave her great importance among the villagers; she was no longer the market gardener's drudge, but a person of some dignity, and as such could afford to scoff at the "life" that had filled weary days with yearning.

Another factor, in influencing the girl was her loyalty to her mistress. She felt Howarth was using her in some way as a tool against Anna, and felt shame



and remorse at returning deceit for the kindnesses showered upon her. She became convinced the quarry-owner's flatteries were shallow; his protestations of regard, meaningless, and sought to break from him. So the ill-assorted pair began to drift apart; much, let it be said, to the satisfaction of Howarth, who was wise enough to see that the increasing volume of scandal being circulated concerning them did no good and a vast amount of harm.

From the score of swains ready to do her bidding, Ruth had chosen big Andrew Devitt for her prospective mate. Andrew was a champion at both ploughing and wrestling. He was the heaviest man—Mallard excepted—in the Avon Valley, and probably in the West Country.

At wrestling he had defeated the hopes of Devon and of Dorset, though a Cornishman had broken the bone of his forearm in two places. He lived in one of Howarth's Openmarsh cottages, but coveted the rich lands of Llama farm a mile away. To possess these, he had scraped and saved, aye, and had pawned his medals; and Ruth banked his savings at the London County every Monday in Kingsnorton, supplementing them every first of the month with a goodly portion of her own wages.

Even when her mother had died a month previously and the home was sold, Ruth placed the fifteen pounds to Andy's credit at the bank, and possession of the coveted farm was brought a step nearer.

Andrew's big eyes had opened greedily on learning of the reward. A hundred pounds! He lost no time in calculating what he could do with such a sum. The information was in his possession. Why should he not turn it into hard cash when such a golden opportunity offered? When he consulted Ruth on the matter she was at first doubtful. But the prospect seemed

so good and the chances of being detected so slender, that her scruples were easily overcome. So they set out together for Wichenden bridge that evening.

"Thee mussn't let anyone see 'ee, Andrew," she warned, "if thee dost 'twill be all through three parishes by morning. Tak' th' window over yonder with th' light; Jacky 'll be alone now."

"Thee do seem for to know his movements," said Andrew jealously.

"Never thee mind what I do know. It be the hunered pound we be after. Tak' care o' th' dog Pilot—he be a vicious beast."

The girl shrunk into the shadow of a laurel hedge and waited. A bitter east wind was blowing and her teeth chattered in her head. Against the starlight the house loomed gloomy and funereal. Andrew was peeping through the corner of a blind wondering how to attract the quarryowner's attention without being seen by the servants when she saw a figure glide from out the shadows and hurl itself upon the ploughman.

"Ho! ho! rascal," she recognized Howarth's voice, "robbery is your game, eh? Pilot will see to you. Here; Pilot—thieves!"

A big mastiff bounded forward with red fangs agape. The ploughman shrieked in terror at each leap of the dog. At last Howarth seized him by the collar and when he had him well in his grip called off the dog.

"I be no thief," protested Andrew, "all the countryside do know I as an honest ploughman. 'Tis thirty-five year o' life Im had an' never seed the inside o' 'Norten gaol yet—an' please God I never will. I be no thief, but comed as according to the notice pasten up on Mallard's barn!"

At this, Howarth released his hold and invited the ploughman indoors. He smiled at Devitt's reluctance to enter the house by any other entrance than by the

rench window. Acceding to his request he opened this and admitted his visitor into his study. This same room had witnessed many strange scenes, but few stranger than that which occupied the next hour.

Howarth, with back to the fire, clad in the broadcloth of a country gentleman, subjected his visitor to a scathing examination.

"Supposing I accept your story, Devitt, and believe you have come here in response to the notice, you will agree I have a right to inquire your motive."

"Motif? What be motif, maister?"

"The cause. That which induced you to come here."

"Nought induced me to come here, maister" replied Andrew.

"Something must have induced you, idiot! were you influenced by a desire to help the authorities?"

Andrew shook his head in a decided negative.

"I do have no love for they."

"Then we will say you were influenced by malice. Perhaps someone has wronged you and you come here with your information to get even with them."

"Nay my knuckles here do even up my wrongs. But you be a poor guesser, maister, for I comed for the reward o' a hunered pounds."

The ploughman's eyes glistened with avarice; his fingers clutched nervously at the seam of his trousers.

"What would you do with such a sum?"

"That be my business, maister. Do 'ee pay over thik hunered, and I'll tell 'ee in two words where the gipsy be hidden."

"Oh no!"

"Then thee mun go otherwheres for thee information."

"There will be no need. I already know where Jo is; in fact have known where he was since the day of the riots"



Howarth lit a cigar; he smiled at Andrew's crest-fallen countenance; the poor fellow's dreams of early possession of Llama form had been shattered in that short sentence.

"Then why did 'ee pasten up the notice, if thee knowed?" he demanded.

Howarth's face broadened into a grin.

"That be my business," he mimicked.

Andrew resented this.

"Thees't crafty maister, but craft be not everything I can afford to bide a bit before evening tonight's business up!"

"Just as you wish," answered Howarth, "but do not bandy your threats so freely. They are depreciating the reward I had intended giving you. I am even now perplexed at what figure to fix it. Miss Boulton, at the Manor, has the reputation of being an excellent arbitrator, maybe if the matter was put before her——"

The ploughman interrupted him pleadingly. "For heaven's sake do'anee, Maister. I be sorry for'all I did say in temper. Do'ee tak' pity on a poor tempted ploughman. Folks 'll skin I alive for crackin' on."

"On one condition. That if at any time I want you, you are to come. If you fail me, you will be sorry. Do you understand."

Devitt promised and hurried off as though the house were stricken by the plague.

"Nay," he answered Ruth, "not so much as a golden guinea! He did know from the first wheer the gipsy be hid, and did set his traps to catch a big fool like I."

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Since Ruth's defection Howarth had long felt the need of a dupe—someone who moved among the people of the villages who could bring him first hand information of the doings and sayings that concerned himself. He had adopted the ruse of the notice to this end, but he felt doubtful whether the discovery of Andrew Devitt would fill the need. Andrew was a clumsy, awkward fellow, with a penchant for flying off into disconcerting tempers and the only thing that Howarth could find about the man to give him any satisfaction was his greed. This he felt sure he could use as a lever for getting his will with the ploughman, and decided to exploit it for all it was worth.

And exploit it he would have done, had Ruth not decided upon another course, designed to upset the quarryowners calculations.

"'Twas a fool's idea!" Ruth wailed at his non-success, "nought but bad could come o' 't. Jacky 'll tell Miss Anna; I'll be sent away pack and package, and the villagers 'll tin kettle th' pair o' us out o' th' village, oh! I be so miserable. Why did 'ee put such a fool idea into my head!"

"We mun think o' somethin' Ruth," rejoined Andrew.

He scratched his head vigorously in an attempt to stimulate his sluggish brain.

"'Tis no good waiting to think o' somethin'," replied Ruth, "we mun get ahead o' Jacky and mak' our confession."

"What to Miss Anna?" Andrew asked aghast.

"Aye; 'tis the only way. Confession be good for the soul—leastways so I have read."

"Ay; an' 'tis a girt load my soul do bear," he answered heavily.

When Anna returned from her ride the pair knocked timorously at her door, and shuffled in at her bidding. The big ploughman was completely cowed in her presence, and Ruth herself was decidedly 'ill at ease.

"I know what you have come for," said Anna, relieving a silence that was awful for the pair of miscreants. "and I am deeply grieved to find that of all persons, you, Ruth, have betrayed the trust I placed in you. It is a very poor return for what I have done for you."

The poor girl burst into tears at the reprimand, as Anna continued: "you have done me a great harm, rendering me liable to arrest and imprisonment for breaking the letter of the law. You have acted the part of a common informer, something above which I had thought you far superior. As soon as you can make other arrangements, do so, and leave the Manor—I wish never to see you again!"

Ruth flung herself at her mistress pleadingly, "I be penitent, I be," she sobbed, but Anna was firm in her decision and at length bundled the defaulters out of the room.

Robert Haviland succeeded them.

"I have been waiting half an hour," he complained, "Have you had visitors?"

Anna sank wearily onto a sofa.

"Yes; an Iscariot in fustian and an unfaithful maid-servant."

"Someone has betrayed you? I heard of the reward and came over to discuss it with you."

"Please don't. I am so weary of the name of Howarth, his wiles, his machinations, and his chicaneries, that I positively hate the man."

"Ramsden paid me a visit today and went over the defense I had prepared for the Assizes. He approved of it, and when a few of his suggestions have been acted upon, I shall go into the dock with absolute confidence as to the result."

"I believe Howarth is willing to drop the charges, against you. If only to spare yourself the strain of the trial, won't you let me intercede in your behalf?"

"No; I feel it to be a personal matter. Besides, the Bishop desires me to vindicate myself publicly. He has a horror of any of his ministers involving themselves in political quarrels, and leaving the matters unsettled—targets for any person prejudiced against the church. But if you are unwilling to discuss the reward, here is a matter that needs urgent attention—the issuance of invitations to your Christmas Party."

Anna took the list of guests he had prepared, eagerly. How many names have you here," she asked.

"Forty-nine."

"But I have only accommodation for thirty guests."

"Then we must strike off some names." Together they went over the list, adding and eliminating.

"The affair will have quite a convocation flavour," said Anna, "what with Canon Harkness, Mr. Elkes, Mr. Fancoust and yourself present."

"But I shall not be present."

"Why?"

"My old friend, Sanderson, the chaplain at Kingsnorton gaol writes me that through illness of the choir-master of All Saints' the usual carol service at the gaol chapel is likely to be abandoned, so I have volunteered my services."

Anna turned a disappointed face up to him, as he continued.

"This year, the influenza epidemic raging at Kingsnorton, had so depleted the ranks of the choristers that

it has been almost impossible to recruit a choir, so I am likely to fill the dual role of conductor and soloist."

"I am proud of your spirit," answered Anna "though my party will certainly be ruined without you!"

"I may be able to put in an appearance in the evening."

"When I shall have least need of you. I feel utterly distracted; who can take your place?"

"Who better than the Rector of your own parish, Mr. Elkes?"

But Anna refused to be consoled, and turned to the list again with knit brow.

"You have made a serious omission," she announced.

"Whom?"

"John Howarth."

"But surely, Anna——. The other guests would regard it as little short of an insult."

"It would be a real insult to leave him out."

"But think, my dear child, what the consequences may be."

"I have thought and reaffirm my stand. But do not let us quarrel over trifles. I am in the mood for music—come and sing to me and soothe my jangled nerves."

She led him unresistingly to the piano. Haviland possessed a fine baritone voice, and Roger Quilter's fine old songs "Daybreak" and "Memories" proved excellent vehicles for its qualities.

Anna, too, was no mean singer. Her voice had a bird-like brilliance and mellowness. All her notes were just as delightfully silvery toned and simply rose and fell to the fluctuations of the music with exquisite facility. She sang "Rose Softly Blooming" and then with a rapid movement of her flying fingers she broke into the wild beauty of the Second Hungarian Rhapsody—to compose which Franz Liszt had spent three years

among the gipsies of old Roumanie. And as she played the pathos of those homeless folk, the poor tinsel, the gaudy clothes, the dark passionate faces, seemed to rise from the keys. Its strange beauty stirred Robert Haviland's soul, its weird melody haunted him, and as the last note died away he did not stint his praise.

"You are wonderful, Anna; the great Master himself could scarcely have done better."

And so they passed the evening, these two who were both hungering for a word, a touch—but who were afraid to interfere with what they regarded as the decree of fate or the will of God.

When Haviland finally left, Anna sat at her desk and penned an invitation to the Christmas Party with her own hand. She folded it and inscribed on the envelope, "John Howarth, Esq., Wichenden Lodge."

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

When Anna awoke to her first English Christmas morning it was to a scene that will ever be associated with the sacred festival. Some days previously the wind that had been blowing indecisively from nor'-nor'-east suddenly veered round eastwards and the wiseacres predicted a white Christmas. This east wind had been bitterly cold, spreading a thin film of ice over the ponds and "watersplashes" which abounded in the dips of the old roads. As many as twenty degrees of frost had been recorded and a continuance of the frost bade fair to make skating possible wherever there was water.

Springing from her bed, Anna looked upon a scene, which although in another environment she had been familiar with all her life, did not fail to thrill her with its beauty.

On Christmas Eve snow had fallen persistently all day, encompassing the earth with its sparkling mantle, and after another heavy fall during the night, it hung glittering on the gnarled branches of the tall poplars about the Manor House. Only far away by Openmarsh village where children were at play on the ice, was the white monotone broken by any colouring.

And she fell to thinking what Christmas would mean to the myriads who would celebrate it that day. To each it would bring a message, and revive memories, happy and sad. Over in Combe Dayrell village she knew preparations for Christmas had been going on for weeks beneath each snow-clad roof. Buxom Mrs. Netherway had scrubbed and scoured until not a speck of dust was to be found from basement to attic; the son in "Mericky" might unexpectedly return—~~he~~ was

her annual excuse for this annual scour. Mrs. Pinchin had vied with Mrs. Nutt in decking the largest Christmas tree in the parish; whilst Polly Perkins had been baking for weeks, as though in expectation of the valley being beleaguered. A merry Christmas party would assemble at the "Cardinal," and for the sake of the unlucky innkeeper, she hoped it would be a peaceable one.

Then she thought of the homes where Christmas would be but a mockery: the homes bereft of their menfolk who were in gaol waiting trial for their share in the riots. She had seen to it that these homes lacked nothing of material comforts this day, but the vacant chairs would serve to remind them that "peace and goodwill among men" was but an empty phrase.

Of herself she thought last. The day was to be for her a great occasion. For the first time since coming to the neighborhood she was to be "at home" to the county people. "The Quality." All the people "who mattered" for miles around would be guests at her board for two or three days, and it was with high anticipation she dressed herself and proceeded downstairs

Elsbeth, to judge by her preparations, fully expected, as Anna smilingly remarked, a return visit from William of Orange and his entourage, whom, tradition credited with having once graced the house with his presence at Yuletide. The good housekeeper had had the servants early astir, and marshalling them like an ambitious general had bristled with impatience until a plan of campaign she had formulated overnight was executed.

Finding herself in the way Anna was glad to place herself in the hands of Ruth to be prepared for morning service. The mistress had relented in her decision to dismiss her maid after the confession of her guilt; and to judge from the alertness and regard Ruth paid her



Anna was being fully reimbursed for any suffering she had experienced.

\*Parson's bell was dying when Anna took her place in the Boulton pew. Combe Dayrell church was a small but interesting structure; in shape cruciform, having a Norman Tower, squat and embattled, at the Northern end. The doorway was a remarkable piece of sculpture, imaginative in conception and rich in execution, yet with a barbaric rudeness in its treatment. On the lintel was depicted the combat between St. Michael and Satan, the former represented by a small winged figure holding a cross to thrust down the mouth of the latter, an immense dragon with terrible jaws and extended tongue.

Around the chancel wall were monumental brasses to the Boulton family and in the East window the quartered shield of their arms could be discerned.

From her pew, Anna could see the rows of apple-cheeked villagers—the women in gaily coloured frocks the men in sober homespuns. It was good to hear their lusty voices singing the responses.

The church had been brightly decked with bay and holly and about the lectern and pulpit, green winter rushes had been plaited by patient hands.

Silvery haired Canon Harkness spoke of sacrifice in his simple homily: the sacrifice of the man of Bethlehem and of Calvary. His quiet earnestness impressed Anna immensely; his message had reached at least one heart; and avoiding the usual crowd that lingered after service in the churchyard, she walked home.

Then she did an extraordinary thing in the circumstances. After a hasty lunch, she ordered the dogcart

\*Parson's bell—The five second bell, the tolling of which gives the cue to the clergyman to leave his vestry at the commencement of divine service.



and drove off in the direction of Kingsnorton at the very time she should have been preparing to receive her guests.

The bay horse made light of the seven odd miles to the town, and driving up to the "White Hart" she left her vehicle there, and finished her journey on foot. Up the Main street, into the eastern side she went, following roads that wound through the poorest part of the town. Past grimy cloth mills, belching—even on this day—foul smoke; sordid dwellings and even more sordid "gin palaces," until she reached a grey, forbidding building at the top of a steep hill—sprawling indeed on the hilltop like some recumbent gorgon—and halted before the huge studded doors.

It was Kingsnorton gaol, and the warder who opened the door at her ring ushered her in wonderingly. Her request to see the Chaplain was acceded to, and a few moments later she entered the vestry of the prison chapel, where Robert Haviland was busy arranging the score for a group of choirsters.

He was astounded at the appearance of Anna; too astounded to speak.

"I have come to help you out," she said, "I heard you say you were short of soloists, and do so want to help. May I?"

"But—," he answered, "your guests?"

"Mrs. Harkness has promised to substitute as hostess. Please don't turn me away. I know all the solos of the 'Nativity'—we used to sing that 'way back home.'"

The Chaplain pleaded her cause.

"I am sure it is splendid of Miss Boulton to thus volunteer her services; if she is acquainted with the piece why not give her a part?"

Anna cast him a grateful look and noted with pleasure that Haviland began a revision of his score to accommodate the new vocalist.

At length everything was ready and the little band filed slowly into the prison chapel. It was a little brick structure, severely plain and coldly forbidding, a few steps separated the chancel from the main body where in the plain deal pews the congregation of convicts was gathered.

The choristers took their places to the hushed strains of a Saint-Saens offertoire, and Anna, keeping close to the protective shadow of the uncarved reredos surveyed the upturned faces of the convicts—rough faces, crafty faces, brutal faces—but few that bore signs of penitence. Here was herded the unfortunate with the criminal, whilst grouped together in separate pews were the unconvicted men—the men awaiting trial, among them being the Kingsnorten and Openmarsh rioters.

The prisoners joined in the opening carol; the chaplain gave a short seasonable address; the organ quivered with the opening bars of the "Nativity;" and as the choristers took their cue, Anna was conscious of Robert Haviland's eye being fixed on her steadily. His baton came down warningly in her direction as the time for her solo approached; a lump seemed to stick in her throat and to make her utterly incapable of going through with the part. But Robert Haviland's eye again fell upon her, and putting aside her agitation she forgot her audience, forgot the occasion, and sang as she had never sang before in her life. From her lips her soul seemed to take wing as she threw her whole strength into the happy task. She sang of the Star in the East; the coming of the wise men; of the gifts of gold, of frankincense and of myrr; of the birth of Christ; the joy of His Mother and the Saviour of the world. And as she sang many a tear was furtively shed, many a hardened lip trembled, and many a sob was stifled. As her final note trembled on the hushed air the sun break-

ing through the cloud banks that had obscured it all day, shone through the chancel window flooding the girl with its golden light.

A burst of spontaneous applause came from the chapel. In vain the warders tried to suppress it, and the pealing organ drowned the shuffling of prisoners as they filed back to their cells to bear with them the memory of that sweet singer clothed in the gold of the westering sun.

"How very irregular, such poor form" commented Mrs. Inskip.

"My dear it is atrocious form," emphasised Mrs. Elkes.

The good ladies seated in the drawing room of the Manor discussed their hostess' extraordinary lapse in leaving them to their own resources. Whatever its cause, it could not claim priority in their opinion of etiquette. Etiquette was a religion with them; nothing could not justify an offence against it.

"I'm afraid the poor dear is rather impulsive," remarked Mrs. Inskip.

"Yes; living in the remote places of the earth is apt to make one very unstable," replied Mrs. Elkes.

"I had a brother who lived in China for some years, and on his return he never could use himself to civilized society again. His eccentricities were amazing."

"How sad. Miss Boulton is eccentric, too, I fear; but for this, one could almost love the creature."

"My yes; perhaps," Mrs. Elkes did not share her companion's opinion, "but it is doubtful whether she will ever manage to eliminate the disgusting cowpuncher atmosphere she manages to carry about with her."

"Time; my dear—time, and a husband, will work many changes." Mrs. Inskip glanced meaningly at her soldier son; she did not attempt to disguise her wishes on the subject. Mrs. Elkes, who had two unmarried

daughters, either of whom she would have gladly married to Captain Inskip, read the glance jealously.

"I am entirely in agreement, my dear; and I said to David only yesterday that no more excellent person in the whole world could be found for the girl than Robert Haviland."

Mrs. Inskip dropped her lorgnette hastily.

"Robert Haviland?" she echoed.

"Yes; haven't you noticed how constantly they are in one another's company? But I forgot you live so far away; did you live in Combe Dayrell the shadow of this coming event would be as apparent to you as it is to us."

"But it is preposterous—Haviland is quite forty—grey haired, a semi-invalid, and penniless except for one of the poorest livings in the whole Diocese. It would be a crime, for him to marry Miss Boulton—a crime!"

Mrs. Elkes enjoyed her consternation.

"Have you noticed," she whispered, "that Robert Haviland is also an absentee this afternoon, although I could swear he has been invited. It would not surprise me in the least to see the pair walk in arm in arm and announce their engagement. It would be just such a denouement as one could expect from such creatures as a prairie girl and a middle-aged bachelor who has lost his head."

Captain Inskip broke in upon their conversation.

"Hello! Mater; carving up somebody's carcass, eh, what?"

"We were discussing generalities, Mrs. Elkes and I," the good dame replied, sedately, "but pray be careful or you will slash Helen there with your spurs."

The elder of the Vicar's twin daughters swung around. She was a tall slender, but athletic girl, and differed only from her sister Regina in the matter of colouring.

Both had the same pink complexions and red lips; but whereas Helen's hair was deep auburn, Regina's was almost black. They were inseparable companions.

"Why do you wear those absurdly archaic things," she asked in her high pitched voice, "they have no earthly use. I have a blue gelding that I bet you don't sit a couple of minutes with those things on your heel."

"If I didn't wear 'em," answered the Captain: "I'd be considered undressed, you know. But speaking of geldings—did you ever see my 'Trilby'—the one that nearly won the Ryde Point to Point last year?"

"Yes; your mater let me ride him in the ladies' mile at Bath—he's a cowardly brute. Regina rode the winner "Miss Mourne," a thoroughbred Irish mare, a blood descendant of the nine-legged mare who took the glen at a leap, the hill at a standing jump and caught up the wind before her, though the wind behind could not overtake her."

"What are you two talking about—horses?" asked the other twin, Regina.

Horses constituted an inexhaustible subject of conversation for the twin daughters of Mrs. Elkes, which was not surprising considering they spent the greater part of their waking hours in equine company—riding, driving, hunting, racing or in the show ring.

Mrs. Elkes looked with approval at the trio as they heatedly discussed some debatable point; but after a while the joint arrival of Anna and Robert Haviland turned their thoughts into other channels.

The long dining hall had been decorated with laurel leaves and holly and the red berries glistened brightly in the soft candlelight. The oak panelling of the walls shone in the light of the huge log fires and the portraits of Anna's ancestors and of the Duchesnes—a maternal branch of the family—looked down upon a

brilliant scene as the guests took their places at the table.

In her filmy white gown, Anna looked radiantly beautiful; her cheeks were a little flushed with excitement; a trace of nervousness was apparent in her demeanour.

Canon Harkness sat on her right and a Mr. Adderly on her left. The former was rather deaf and the latter too much absorbed in his young wife to pay Anna much attention. So she had ample liberty to observe her guests. She was amused at the profuse attentions cheery Dr. Earnshaw paid the elderly Miss Ramsden; whilst Ramsden himself paid court to the doctor's white haired mother. Mrs. Harkness and the Vicar of Combe Dayrell discussed the Annual Meeting of the church Pastoral Aid; Helen and Regina Elkes still debated horses and dogs with Captain Inskip; whilst Robert Haviland supported a conversation with the young daughter of the Kingsnorton Bank Manager.

A few toasts followed the meal and after a welcoming speech by Canon Harkness, cries of speech threw Anna into a sudden panic.

Very reluctantly she rose to her feet.

"Just previous to his remarks," she began, "the Canon informed me that on the last occasion he saw me I was the most noisy, undisciplined little brat in the whole county, and possessed the pinkest toes. I must have passed the brat period or he would not have welcomed me home as sincerely as he has just done; but whether my toes are still pinker than anyone else's is a matter I shall not let even him decide! Your hearty seconding of his welcome is encouraging; it gives me joy and hope; and I trust that I may be spared to remain many years among you in this beautiful home county of ours."

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

The more sober observances of Christmas Day were succeeded on the morrow by a day given over to festivity. From early morning people from the neighborhood trekked over to the meadow reaches for the ice sports. With their skates slung over their shoulders, toboggans trailing behind them, or snow shoes tucked under their arms they poured into the valley, until by noontime the place echoed and re-echoed with their laughter and shouting—the whole mingling into a medley of sound that fell pleasantly on the ear. Men, women, boys and girls—everybody active enough to join in the sport, was there. On the ice track a multitude of skaters glided and glanced in a hundred directions; some pattern weaving, others figure cutting, whilst a great serpent, composed of quite three score of humans, frolicked good humoredly among the crowds. Life and movement were everywhere, and colour to relieve the landscape's white.

In the villages, too, ancient and picturesque ceremonies were being revived. At Combe Dayrell the village children paraded under the direction of Joshua Hoyle, the schoolmaster. From door to door they collected presents—here a fruit cake, there mincemeat pies, here "fat" cakes, apples, honey, cream or choice confections. Nor did they omit to call at the Manor, the Surgery or the Vicarage.

At the latter place, the Schoolmaster marshalled his charges in a ring at the largest and oldest apple tree and dancing them round it fiddled a lively air whilst they sang their customary song—



"Here's to thee, old apple tree;  
 Whence thou mays't bud and whence thou mays't  
 blow,  
 And whence thou mays't bear apples enow;  
 Hats full, caps full, bushel bushel sacks full,  
 Old Parson's breeches full, and my breeches full too.  
 Huzza!"

Then, loaded with their good things, they repaired to the Schoolhouse to prepare the feast that would be theirs later in the day.

The Manor party was early astir. The irrepressible Captain Inskip with the help of the village carpenter had improvised a family toboggan, and for two hours had been enjoying the sport.

Anna's natural knowledge of ice sports stood her in good stead. Entering into the spirit of the day she introduced many novelties they had never before experienced, and the luncheon hour came all too soon.

In the afternoon a long stretch of virgin ice at the rear of the Manor was broken. Past the village the stretch skirted the Vicarage garden, opening out into a broad expanse where the skaters from the town were being thinned by the approach of dusk. The sun piercing through the smoke-blue shadows of the trees, made red pools of light on the ice. The air was so crisp and clear that to breathe it was an exhilaration. And as the sun turned from yellow to crimson the flitting forms of the skaters gave the scene a faerie touch such as those Northern tellers of tales have caught in their Sagas of this loveliest of seasons—winter.

With feet flying over the ice, Anna sped down the long stretch, a bright figure in her gaily embroidered coat. A clump of beeches jutted into the fairway, and making a detour to avoid them she was conscious of a shadow bearing down swiftly upon her from behind.

John Howarth's voice rang clear and commanding:—

"Bear to the centre; I will join you from behind."

Without a murmur she obeyed, and presently he grasped her hands, pinioning them behind. The contact was made skilfully and easily and they speeded on at a great rate. Anna felt impelled forward, helplessly. Her feet were forced to answer the call upon them as at a headlong pace they flew past Combe Dayrell village, over the marshes and onto the broad frozen river. The wind rushed in her ears; trees, shrubs, houses, churches, barns, all flew past in a dazzling swirl, and it was with a feeling of relief that she felt her partner ease up as they left the river and finally come to a standstill underneath a group of oak trees.

She was amazed to find the quarryowner was quite fresh. A little brown squirrel peeped coyly at them from under a bough, and with a haughty plash of its tail disappeared to its secret home. A finch flitted about the traceried boughs, but otherwise the place was quite deserted. The valley mist was rising, creating ghostly shapes out of the trees and bushes.

"You know how to skate," he said enthusiastically.

"And you how to speed. It was lucky for us no traffic 'coos' were about."

"I tried to tire you," he admitted.

"And you have succeeded; I am almost breathless."

"It will pass," he said, offering his arm for support. Anna took it gladly.

"Why did you not come to my party?" she said, "you were invited."

"I d'd not wish to ruin it. I am the black sheep of the social family, hereabouts. But my absence from the party does not mean I am ungrateful at the honour of being invited."

"What is this new trouble I hear you are in. Something about farmer Hardisty?"

"Oh; no trouble at all. Hardisty had some prize cattle poisoned and because I was competing against him in the fat stock show, concluded I had had a hand in the matter. An autopsy has shewn that the animals died through eating hemlock leaves, but Hardisty still thinks I was at the bottom of the matter even though everybody knows the soil of Summerfallow has always been favourable to the growth of the noxious weed!"

"But Hardisty's untruths can be stopped—there is a law of libel in the land."

Howarth laughed softly.

"I am used to these petty annoyances—so used to them, that they cease to trouble me, I shall have had enough of laws and courts after the Assizes next month."

Anna looked grave.

"Are you still determined to see that thing through? Don't you think those poor people have suffered sufficiently?"

"I do not think anything at all about it, except that if I drop out now, I shall be branded a coward."

"And not even you, inured as you are to insults and hard names, could tolerate that, I suppose."

"No; I have never yet been truthfully called a coward and God helping me, I never will. It is the last honourable rag these people have left me, and I must fight to maintain it."

"Well; my only hope in preventing you from giving evidence is to kidnap you for the period of the trials."

"You might find me a willing prisoner."

"But I am serious."

"So am I. Would it not be more pleasant to be held captive by such a gaoler than to have to sit in a stuffy Assize court, giving unpleasant evidence and maybe, being pelted with bad eggs and market refuse?"

Anna turned to him squarely.

"Do you know," she said, "you are the queerest mixture I have ever met. I hate you—oh, so intensely—for some things; and for others I admire you. I can never be sure very long together what my feelings are going to be towards you. You are so stubborn,—and, yes I will say it—so selfish—that the power you wield in this Avon Valley constitutes a grave menace."

"Maybe," he answered, "But I feel any power I had is leaving me. The bright eyes of a woman, the silken gloss of her hair, the touch of her life-vibrant hands are taking it from me. Do you know my whole future could be held in your hands to make or mar as it pleases you?"

"Temporarily, when the eyes have lost their lustre, the hair its sheen, and the hands their youthful blood, what then? Such a love, based only on material things lasts only as long as their quality remains the same."

The breath laboured within his body.

"Anna—I must and will claim the privilege of so calling you—this thing I have conceived for you I believe to be very real and lasting. Oh! what can I do to prove the truth of my words?"

"You surely cannot expect me to place any faith in your protestations of regard when but a few weeks back you were scheming to use a poor fool of a ploughman against me; when you have corrupted my household to conspire against me; when you have hung over my head the Damoclean sword of a paltry reward. Reason tells me such are not the acts of a lover."

"I know my record is a disastrous one; and would fain begin anew; won't you help me? To show my sincerity I will accede to your former request, and not even the fear of the name 'coward' shall secure my presence at the Assizes."

Anna paused before replying.

"To gain even the liberation of these men, I could not consent to your humiliating yourself. You must attend the trials and give evidence. The only condition I would impose upon you is that you keep free of those brawls you seem to be constantly mixed up in. You are far too headstrong—I do not think you were licked sufficiently when a boy, and I must start in now and make up some of the leeway."

"I enjoy your verbal chastisements," he admitted, "but do not forget that if I am headstrong or selfish, your good judgment and charity can supply the leaven to my character. It is no light power you hold, and I would have you ponder deeply on my words."

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

It was characteristic of the man,\*that John Howarth loved intensely. He was incapable of lukewarmness in anything; there was no medium in his nature; he had to take a thing up with all his heart or leave it alone. He had determined to get possession of Anna, and every fibre of his body strained to the task, every thought that occupied his brain swung to the problem. His body was suffering under the strain. Folks noticed his tired, restless looks, his pre-occupation, his lack of interest in anything that did not directly bear on the thing that dominated his thoughts.

The passion he nourished was genuine enough. Even Anna herself had ceased to regard the turn in events with suspicion. He was suffering—intensely suffering—but she did not feel called upon to hasten matters, and so succeeded in keeping him at arm's length, without, however, repulsing his attentions.

He craved nothing better than to be near her—to watch her movements and to hear her voice—and to this end he acquainted himself with her daily routine; trained his ear to detect her horse's hoofbeats on the hard roads that he might waylay her; and waited for hours at a vantage point on the hill simply to catch a glimpse of her carriage lights as she drove between the villages below. As the day fixed for the Assizes drew near, Howarth became anxious as to how Anna would spend the day. Knowing something of the people, he anticipated more trouble in Kingsnorton and attempted to get her to promise she would not enter the town. But Anna had decided beforehand her plans, and when the great day arrived she drove into the

town and from the vantage point at the White Hart, watched the stream of country carts climb the narrow High Street and the long lines of pedestrians plod along, grim defiance written upon each weather-beaten face. An extra force of constables was out but the tradespeople not only kept the shutters up to their windows, but in many cases, reinforced the shutters with iron bars.

The trial of the rioters seemed to awaken the countryside. The mills were almost deserted, business everywhere was at a standstill; everybody seemed to make for the Market Square, and a crowd, considerably larger than even the authorities had anticipated, waited for admission to the Law Courts. Only a small part of the crowd gained admission to the public gallery, and the remainder waited outside to while the tedious hours away with such amusements as they could devise.

Inside the hotel the few people conversed on matters incidental to the trial and as she sat, Anna could not help overhearing fragments of their conversations. One man was informing the company as to the Circuit Judge, and his description did that personage no flattery. "A red faced fellow" he said, "who allows his judgments to fluctuate according to how he has come off in the wordy duels with the advocates, with never a thought for the man in the dock—whose very future may hang upon his decision."

"Yes;" said another, "twas he who lectured the Hallingdean shepherd for half-an-hour after sentencing him to death. When he had done the shepherd said that the worst part of the business had been gotten over, and he'd rather be hung twice than listen to another such speech. He is the terror of witnesses, too. If they don't speak up, he fairly bites off their heads, whilst if they do speak up he continually threatens

them with contempt of court: Ah! he's a warm customer!"

"He'll find his match in Wicked Jack" ventured one of the company.

"Yes; I'd give a goodly penny to be in court when Jack goes in the box. 'Twill be a case of Greek meeting Greek!"

And as the afternoon wore on, conflicting reports trickled through as to the progress of the trials. Each newcomer brought a different tale from the last, and so Anna determined to investigate herself. In the Market Square she found a crowd of some twenty or thirty thousand persons; an orderly good humored crowd that was enjoying to the full the discomfiture of Mayor Coomber in giving evidence, as reported by a friendly policeman on guard at the Courthouse doors. Hisses, groans and cheers also greeted the testifying of other witnesses, and so deafening did the roar outside the Courts become that the irate judge threatened to close the cases until order could be restored. But he was destined to suffer even greater annoyance, for when it became known that John Howarth had stepped into the witness box, a great united howl of anger went up and the crowd surged restlessly about the doors.

But there was a lull in the proceedings; something unusual was happening; the policeman at the doors was too engrossed with what was happening inside the Court to pay any heed to the demands of the crowd for information.

As predicted, Howarth was having a wordy duel with the judge. His answers to the questions of counsel had brought forth a sharp reprimand from the bench; Howarth had persisted in his attitude; he would tell only the barest tale of what had occurred at the riots and even that much had to be wrung from him by Crown Counsel's persistent cross-examination. The quarry-



owner was the chief witness for the prosecution; upon his evidence the whole charges pivoted, and the judge realizing that if he was to formulate an intelligent summing-up, much of his material must come from Howarth, protested against the quarryowner's monosyllabic testimony. From that point a wordy duel between Howarth and the judge ensued, and after threatening his antagonist with numberless pains and penalties under "Vic." "Cap." and "Sec.," for "conspiring to defeat the ends of justice," his honour declared Howarth to be a hostile witness whose evidence was inadmissible."

When this state of affairs became known, the tumult outside grew in intensity. The crowd wrongly interpreted the quarryowner's action, thinking him to be in fear of the common folk, and upon this presumption they based cries of "Coward."

Anna heard the cries in anger. The blood mounted to her face and instinctively she clenched her hands tightly. Leaving the Square she hastened back to the Inn and seeing to the harnessing of her horse, began to climb a street that ran parallel with the Main Street and at right angles with the Market Square. The short winter's day was fast drawing to a close and a keen wind was sweeping down the narrow street. Drawing her rug about her, she let the bay horse choose its own pace as, with pedestrians filling the streets, driving was difficult. At the intersection of Mercers' Lane, upon which the rear of the Law Courts abutted, a crowd had rigged up a rude effigy of Howarth, which, after solemnly hanging, they were consigning to the flames of a huge bonfire. A dull roar from the nearby Market Square told her that the trials were still on, and the interest of the waiters unabated.

As Anna reined in her horse to watch the strange ceremony of the burning, a familiar voice greeted her ear.

"I suppose I should feel grateful to these fellows for providing me with the unique experience of witnessing my own hanging and roasting."

Anna turned sharply in her seat. John Howarth was leaning at the side of the vehicle, full in the light of the bonfire, recognisable to anyone who happened to see him.

"Oh! foolish man," she scolded him warmly, "to venture in this place at such a time. For heaven's sake climb up and let me get you away before you are recognized."

He was very calm.

"Do you hear them calling me 'coward'?" he said. "I was never that— it is too much for a man to stand!"

He stepped into the lane and entered the crowd. Anna could see his towering head as he approached the ringleaders at the bonfire. She sat terrified as a sudden movement in the crowd, a closing around the quarry-owner, was made. Springing from the vehicle she crossed over to the mob. Howarth was standing with his arms folded across his breast. "Who calls me 'coward'?" he was asking.

An awkward big limbed fellow spat on the ground and looked at Howarth derisively. "I do!" he answered.

There was a thud as the two heavy bodies closed; a short sharp struggle, and the insulter lay on the cobbles with a badly mauled forearm. Howarth stood apart for the next assailant—a pugilist by profession, if looks went for aught. A blow in the eye, reopened an old wound and blinded by blood, the quarryowner proved an easy mark for his assailant who rained a multitude of blows upon him. However the pugilist's success proved his undoing, for taking the liberty of dropping his guard the better to pummel the quarryowner, the latter brought down his fist upon his jaw

with such force as to break it so badly that a splinter of bone was forced upwards and projected from his cheek.

By this time the police were beginning to interfere and this was the signal for a general display of hooliganism in which Howarth was struck down from behind. Anna saw him fall, and pressing forward, recognized with joy, Andrew Devitt, the Openmarsh ploughman, amongst the crowd. He was laughing heartily at Howarth's downfall, but as Anna eagerly plucked his sleeve, his face changed instantly. But he did not dare disobey the Mistress of the Manor when she commanded him to rescue Howarth, and ploughing a way through the crowd with his flail-like arms dealt some prodigious blows before he could drag away the body of the insensible quarryowner. As following Anna's instructions, he deposited the body in her vehicle, an ugly rush was made by the disappointed crowd.

The police were powerless to help, and after bidding Anna to drive off as fast as she could, Devitt made good his own escape.

The bay horse responded well to Anna's appeal. He shook himself clear of a couple of men who attempted to take his head; only when a group of men formed a barrier across the road did he falter. The barrier was increasing in strength, stretching across the narrow road and her only chance of escape was to drive right through it. Seizing her whip she dealt the horse a stinging blow that caused it to bound madly forward, its prancing forefeet scattering the men like nine-pins. Down the narrow street flew the startled horse, threatening to overturn the frail cart at each bound. The whole howling mob had now started in pursuit; some took short cuts through alleyways and awaited the vehicle further down the road, and it seemed that the

cart must eventually be stopped. But Anna kept her nerve, her strong supple body swayed with the motion of the vehicle, her wrists of steel never allowed the bay horse to get out of control for a moment; her voice encouraged or her thong hissed at need. Finding themselves outdistanced the crowd resorted to stone throwing, a dull thud on the back or sides of the vehicle every now and again announcing how near the throwers had gone in their aim.

Anna did not rein in her horse until they were well out of danger. Until then she had had no opportunity of seeing in what condition the quarryowner was. She found him lying back onto the seat of the cart, his head on his breast and his arms hanging at his sides—he was just faintly conscious.

"What has happened?" he asked, presently as the cool night air revived him.

"Only the natural sequel to your rashness!" she answered, with a trace of annoyance.

He pulled himself together; covered in blood and dust as he was, he looked a pitiable sight, and Anna could not repress a shudder. He glanced anxiously around, and his companion anticipated his query.

"The mob are far behind—they gave up the chase by the Corn Exchange. You owe your deliverance from the jaws of death to the strong right arm of Andrew Devitt and the fleetness of foot and fine mettle of my bay horse."

"And you?"

"Mine was a minor part—a mere director—a puller of strings."

He leaned heavily against her for support, and his hand rested on her arm. Her wince of sudden pain was not lost upon him. "What is it?" he asked.

"Only a bruise. There was a mutual mixing of blows all around when you fell and I guess I received my share, although I do not remember having done so."

He glowered fiercely; his swollen mouth set horribly; and his fists clenched in anger.

"Did they lay their foul hands on YOU!—My God! Why did you endanger yourself; why did you not leave me to take care of myself?"

"You would have been as defunct as your effigy by now, if I had. But let me tie my handkerchief over your eye, it is bleeding afresh. And this knitted scarf will make you an excellent turban, I do not need it; I am used to more frigid weather than you ever have in England."

A silence fell between them, broken only by the regular beat of the horse's hoofs upon the road.

"Let us hope they have the Mayor's chain in safer keeping, this time," Howarth remarked at last, "The gipsy is a lucky man to have escaped the dock today. Why did you befriend him—he is safer under lock and key?"

"Maybe; how do you think the Rector will fare tomorrow?"

"He has naught to fear. He should be grateful to me."

"How so?"

"Had I not caused him to be arrested he would have automatically become chief witness for the Crown on my defection. As it is the charge precludes him from giving evidence."

"What will follow your action today?"

"I do not know, neither do I care. I am satisfied to have carried out your wishes."

"But I did not wish you to fall foul of the law."

"For the men's sake you wished me to absent myself from the trials; for my own sake you wished me to



attend. By nullifying my evidence the object of both wishes has been obtained."

The bay horse slackened up as they entered the Wichenden road; Howarth protested at her coming so far out of her road with him. At the Lodge gates he dismounted unsteadily. Her small, firm hand, bared of its glove, rested at the edge of the trap. Taking it in his broad palms the quarryowner touched it with his lips.

"What does my wise counsellor require of me?" he asked.

"Simply this: that you begin to live the life of an ordinary, sane person; this will of yours must be curbed; you must see how unprofitable your swashbuckling through life is; if I had the power I would paint you as you are now—in all your torn and bleeding state, with the marks of those brutish hands on your body, and inscribe below 'The Portrait of a Headstrong Man!'"

## CHAPTER TWENTY

Howarth's refusal to give any but the most fragmentary evidence against the rioters killed the case for the prosecution. Counsel was relying upon the quarryowner's testimony to provide his case and on his defection, the whole thing seemed to collapse like a pack of cards. Of course there were other witnesses—the Mayor, the Superintendent of Police, the Mayor's Sergeant, and others, but the keylink in the chain was missing and it occasioned no surprise when the majority of the rioters were liberated, and only the ringleaders and those against whom specific acts of violence could be proved, were convicted and sentenced. The sentences varied: the heaviest being two years and the lightest, three calendar months. These would, undoubtedly have been trebled by a conscientious testimony from Howarth, and the number of convicted increased also.

Robert Haviland's case had collapsed on the second day. Defying the orders of his doctor, Howarth had again attended the Court, but a couple of minutes on the stand were sufficient to inform the judge that the quarryowner was in no better frame of mind than before, and very promptly he ordered him to stand down. Much to his disappointment, the Rector was not allowed an opportunity to publicly express himself upon the travesty of justice in preferring the charge against him; for the judge stopped the case and discharged the cleric before he had a chance to address the court.

If the millworkers' strike had been a miserable failure, the trial of the rioters was even more so from the

point of view of the authorities, for the people were quick to see the weakness of the law, and staged some ugly demonstrations on the Market Square, especially when the Black Maria appeared to convey the convicted ones to gaol.

But at length the Assizes were over. Men went back to work, and women concerned themselves with their domesticities. The old place shuffled down to its old self, and peace reigned again in Kingsnorton.

The Openmarsh rioters had all been released on a verdict of "not proven," the result of Howarth's refusal to offer evidence, and the troubled valley pursued its old familiar way.

\* \* \*

If the County people had imagined that in Anna a new star had swum into the social firmament, they were doomed to bitter disappointment. Ignoring Robert Haviland's appeals, she neither received visitors nor visited herself, being content to concern herself actively in the development of her estates. Most of her waking hours were spent in the saddle, superintending affairs on her farm and she became to be a very picturesque figure about the countryside. Her charming unaffectedness endeared her to the villagers, few of whom failed to drop her a curtsy or raise a cap as she passed.

Robert Haviland's health had broken, following the trial. His old complaint had troubled him, and had worn him to a shadow of his former self. Anna frequently visited him, and whilst in her company, the Rector seemed to imbibe of her radiant health and joyous delight in life. He rallied at her humor and listened with avidity to the accounts of her rides; the progress on her farm; and her plans for the future. But he suspected much that she did not tell him, of her dealings with Howarth. The canker ate into his heart and threatened to consume his reason. Folks said that



he paused in his sermons; omitted the collects and read the wrong lessons for the day. Dr. Earnshaw protested that he took no interest in his condition and that he ate hardly enough to nourish his body.

As for the quarryowner, his promise to reform was being kept; conditions were improving on his estates; a share system was being introduced into his quarries, and he was releasing land in small parcels so that farmers could establish themselves in the district. He sought the company of Anna continually. Together they rode through the countryside, and she found her companion to be well-informed in local lore and very entertaining. Her opinion of him was changing; how else could it be when he lavished such assiduous attention upon and nurtured such an ardent passion for her? The power she wielded over him she knew to be very real: he was as clay in the hands of the potter. Yet she could not reciprocate the quarryowner's passion. She admired his strength; she was touched by his solicitude for her; his keen interest in the outdoors, his love of animals, his knowledge of husbandry, all appealed to her. But his love for her found no answering chord in her heart. She could regard him dispassionately; could feel his burning kisses on her hand unmoved; could witness his marvellous transformation unthrilled. She saw only the Divine hand in thus making her powerful, and subdued her personal hopes and aspirations in the belief that she was carrying out a divine mission. She would be ready, she told herself, for the sacrifice when the call came.

But a period of heavy, continuous rains, had caused them to remain strangers for more than a week. The Avon valley was flooded, and men who had resided there sixty and seventy years vowed they had never seen the like before. The farmers and landowners of the valley had been busy constructing dams at the river banks,

and a large tract of pasture land had been purposely flooded to keep the swollen river from overflowing on the wheatlands. Even the river's tributaries had been diverted in their courses, for memories of other floods in the valley spurred one and all to put forth their strength ungrudgingly. Each morning Anna had risen from her bed to find the rain still pouring from the leaden sky, the river swollen and threatening, swirling away to the sea.

And on this fourteenth day of the rain she returned home tired and wet, very depressed in spirit. A great hullabaloo was proceeding in the Eastern wing, and entering the kitchen she demanded to know what was the matter.

Elspeth, covered from head to toe with flour was helping the Openmarsh gipsy to his feet following a hearty clout.

"'Tis this varmint, mistress; he do worry th' life out o' I. I did set him for to mix flour for th' bakin' an' this is how he do mix un!" indicating her whitened profile.

"'Tis she," accused the gipsy in return, "I did try to mak' myself useful, but she did bide an' scold, and I did lose my temper."

Anna bundled Jo out of the room. "For shame," she said, "have you so soon forgotten that Elspeth's care alone brought you back to life?"

"She allus be on at I, mistress—an my ears do fairly tingle wi' th' weight o' her knuckles."

Anna felt constrained to smile. She knew that Jo's getting into trouble was a milestone marking his progress along the road to recovery. She also knew that convalescence was galling the gipsy beyond words, and that as soon as fine weather set in he would be back at the old haunts and the old life. Knowing the futility of scolding him, she kept her peace.

"Step over to the stables and have Bright saddle Aeolus for me" she asked.

"But surely thee'st not goin' out again, mistress, the night be not fit for a dog."

"However I must go." Calling Ruth she bade her help dress her for the storm, and clad in seasonable garments she stepped out into the night. The wind howled and the rain poured incessantly, making the blackness of the outer world a thing of dread.

Bright fully shared his charge's disgust at being forced to leave the warm stable.

"Do'ancee tak' th' 'Norten road, Mistress," he advised, as Anna mounted the colt, "Brook Bridge be flooded, an' th' water splashes impassable!"

Anna acknowledged his advice as she urged Aeolus forward. The grey Arab picked its way very carefully along the roads, but it was wretched going, and taking the stableman's advice, she headed for the higher and drier ground of the Queckett road, although the distance to her objective,—Wichenden Lodge—would be increased considerably.

At the Lodge she had barely time to dismount when Howarth himself appeared at the door, framed in a background of warm bright light. A servant took Aeolus' bridle and led him off as she ascended the steps to the house.

"Welcome; O daughter of wind and storm!" Howarth greeted her, as he helped her off with the dripping cloak.

"Be sure you have the gender correctly," she answered, "the night is sufficient excuse for such a garb."

Noting his anxiety, she continued.

"Unlike the storm witch, I bring no evil tidings, although my coming here presages as much."

He led the way into the parlor and motioned to her to be seated. Taking up a decanter from the sideboard he poured a glass of sparkling wine.

"Not for me—thanks!" she said.

"Then coffee. My French chef makes the finest coffee in thrée shires."

He departed, and Anna's gaze became fixed upon a marvellous piece of tapestry, a tableau of one of those medley cavalcades so common during the sixteenth century, and depicting Abbots in full armour, wagon loads of victuals, oxen and sheep, headed by a banner on which was worked a plough, a chalice and a Host, a horn and the five wounds of Christ—the well-known badge which marked the fiery cause of the Pilgrimage of grace.

When Howarth returned with the coffee, Anna went straight to the subject of her visit.

"I have come to consult you about the floods, we have been hard at work, but I am not satisfied with what has been done."

"I was down by the river, yesterday," he replied, "and I must say that I felt anything but satisfied myself. That dam you have erected on the southern bank is an absurd affair. Whose idea was it?"

"Robert Haviland's."

"Yet he should know better; he has lived in the valley long enough to know something of the peculiarities of our river. The whole trouble has been brought about by his neglect."

"How so?"

"You see, for many years it has been understood—a sort of unwritten law—for owners of land adjoining to cleanse their part of the river every year. In this way the river is enabled to carry away the water which falls to the catchment area through which it flows. When the Manor Farm was closed, the portion of the river which ran through your estate was neglected. At present it is choked by the heavy heads of fallen withy trees, and ingrown weeds, the silt has not been cleared

and the hatches have fallen into decay. The stone bridge at Openmarsh is not of sufficient height to carry the water off properly, and in places the banks have become defective. All these things should have been remedied when the river was quiet and low. To attempt to do them now would be impossible."

"What can I do?"

"I do not know what you can do, or if you can do anything at all."

"Yet inaction is galling; do please suggest something."

He took a sheet of paper and on it drew a diagram of the river.

"It is a mad scheme, but the only thing left for you to do," he explained, "it means that we must attempt to divert the course of the river above Combe Bridge and flood the country on the Northern bank in order to save the villages clustered on the Southern." He made some notes rapidly and began a series of calculations.

"How many horses have you?" he asked.

"Seventy."

"Men?"

"One hundred and five."

"To these I will add eighty men and thirty teams. We shall require every horse and man in the three parishes. Come; we must not lose precious time. I will ride back with you and get the men started."

Anna rejoiced at his enthusiasm, and caught his eagerness. Thankfully she pressed his hand. "'My Lord Much Maligned' is good!" she said.

"If 'My Lady Great Courage' is pleased, I am well rewarded," he answered her.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

On leaving the Lodge, Anna and Howarth took the road to Openmarsh, where the latter intended to recruit his quarryworkers for the task ahead.

The storm had abated nothing in fury, and their mounts required all their attention. For the way was treacherous and both Aeolus and the mare Howarth rode, showed nervousness at the peals of thunder and periodic flashes of lightning. The Arab's ears lay back flat to his head and he whinnied frequently in terror. All the girl's efforts to inspire him with confidence failed, and she had much ado to prevent him from breaking into a canter.

Once Howarth's horse stumbled upon a heap of road mender's granite dumped by the wayside, and the subsequent scuffling alarmed Aeolus just as Anna thought she had him in effective check. He plunged about as though possessed with the devils of the Gadarene swine, and leaping a low hedge, clambered out of the muddy dyke into open country.

Anna kept her seat, and tightening her hold on the animal's head, brought his wild careering to an end sooner than she herself anticipated. But the Arab was not done for. Resenting the curb upon his bit he backed awkwardly and attempted to throw the clinging thing upon his back that seemed so light and so fragile but yet was so strong and so determined. He tried bucking and rearing, circling and sudden plunging, but the "thing" merely stuck the harder, pulled the stronger and dug a pair of wicked heels into his flanks. Anna had sat horses more savage than Aeolus, wild little Indian ponies, mustangs and wicked-eyed bronchos, that bit with the ferocity of an adder, plunged with the im-

petuosity of a buffalo, leapt with the agility of a panther and fought with the desperation of a lion at bay—smooth, tawny things of muscle but no bone, whom no amount of punishment could subjugate. Her experience stood her in good stead with Aeolus, and at last she had the mastery of him, frothing and snorting hideously but as docile as he had formerly been recalcitrant.

Looking around for her bearings, Anna perceived their antics had taken them a great distance from the road. She halloed to her companion, but no answer was forthcoming; peal upon peal of thunder answered her cries.

And as she groped in the darkness, her horse suddenly slipped into water up to his hocks. He tried to get clear, but the water rose higher until he lost his foothold of firm ground. Anna concluded they had fell foul of one of the deep streams that drained the valley slopes, and her fears were confirmed when a moment later the water lapped about her knees, and they were encompassed by a swirling rapidly-moving torrent. Aeolus made frantic efforts to attain the bank and the girl shifting her weight from the saddle encouraged his efforts. However, she was not ready for the impact when it did come, and was thrown on the colt's haunches. In her efforts to recover her balance, she chucked him violently on the curb, and the animal fell back with a great splash of mud, his hind quarters disappearing like a stone into the slimy bottom of the stream, his forefeet firmly embedded into the mud of the bankside.

Into the turbid waters Anna was flung, and striking for the bankside, she had the mortification of being unable to gain a foothold anywhere. At each attempt she slid back into the stream and in her despair she clung to the roots of a willow to support her head

above water." But the water was icy cold and exhaustion was fast overtaking her.

There was the despair of a doomed soul in her voice as she cried to her companion for help.

For what seemed an interminable time she remained thus, her strength fast ebbing away. But at length, Howarth heard her cries.

"I am coming," he responded, "courage, Anna—I am coming."

He slipped down the bank and raised her in his strong arms; in a moment she was safely on high ground. Thankfully, she clung to him.

"John! John!" she said—and the intimacy was music to the man's ears—"I couldn't have lasted much longer; my limbs were getting numbed."

Her spirits rallied as he moistened her lips with brandy.

"It must be getting an awful bore your fishing me out of the ditches of the district. Your good opinion of my horsecraft has suffered another blow. Aeolus is in the stream some place. I do not know how we will ever get him out."

They found the retrieving of Aeolus a difficult matter, but eventually it was accomplished, and they decided to leave both animals with the blacksmith at Openmarsh, whose wife also found a change of clothing for Anna. Howarth would have had his companion end her journey at the smithy, but her indomitable spirit refused to be conquered by her misfortunes, and once again they set out.

All night long the army of volunteer workers toiled at the river bank under the direction of Howarth. Practically the whole male population turned out, and every available horse was pressed into service. No home was more secure than another against the threatened deluge, and so all worked with such a will that by



daybreak a great bed had been dug adjacent to the northern bank of the river, to receive the surplus water. Higher up the river others were working and as they freed their lands of the flood, the river rose steadily and lapping the dam that Haviland had caused to be constructed, grew more menacing every hour.

Sodden to the skin, Anna moved among the workers, encouraging them by her cheery optimism. She took a hand at driving a team, and several women, including Helen and Regina, the twin daughters of the Rev. Mr. Elkes, did likewise, thus freeing the men for more manual work.

Howarth sought her out eventually. Her limber had sunken to the axles in soft slime and her struggling team strained in vain at the traces. Putting his shoulder to a wheel he bade her drive on, and slowly but surely the wheels revolved, the horses got their grip, and the limber was on dry land again.

"I am afraid we must give up," he said, "the river is constantly rising and in another hour will sweep into this channel. It will relieve the volume of water, but we have begun too late to succeed fully. If we remain here we shall lose our horses and wagons, to say nothing of human life."

Disappointed beyond words, Anna gave instructions for the evacuation of the channel, and the last wagon had only just left, when the waters broke with a roar into the new outlet. The river lowered appreciably, but an hour later some new influx seemed to be making it more threatening than ever.

"They have opened the locks east of the town," said Howarth, "they prefer to swamp us in six feet of water than to wade in an inch themselves!"

As Howarth had suggested, the dam that Haviland had constructed did not inspire confidence. It was a solid enough structure of earth, stone and rubble; it

might have proved effective in checking a mild overflow, but the present raging torrent would sweep it away—that much was apparent.

"I could weep," remarked Howarth, "to think that such an enormous amount of material and labour has been put into such a work—a pure experiment. Experiment at such a time is criminal. Look! it is beginning to fail already!"

A tiny stream was trickling through the dam, scarcely noticeable, at its base.

"Have you any stock in the threatened area?" he asked Anna.

"Some cattle and thoroughbred horses. My barns on the hilly country are all filled."

"Then send them up to the Lodge. Scammel will find house room for them. Crowd all the people in the Manor, too or send them into the hills. This flood will top the six foot mark when it breaks, unless I am mistaken, in half an hour it will be every man for himself."

The garish light of the new day was chasing the dark shadows from the valley slopes; well known objects were revealing themselves and the mockery of a sun tried to struggle through the thick mists which enshrouded it. Suddenly a cry went up—a shrill, heart-rending cry, that was echoed by a hundred throats. Higher up, the river had burst its banks and was flooding the village of Openmarsh. The white sheet was swiftly spreading over the whole valley. Its first onrush had carried it through the village, and only the tops of the cottages were visible. Men, horses, cattle, fled for their lives; some had been caught like rats in a trap and were clinging to the flotsam of the swift current.

Silently but remorselessly, the flood rolled on towards Combe Dayrell. Hay stacks tumbled like packs of cards, farms and outbuildings became isolated islands, trees

shewed but half their height, and hedges and roads were completely blotted from view. When with a great crash the artificial dam gave way, a second great volume of water was added to the first, swelling it into a head-long roaring torrent.

The water swept through the Manor grounds, swirling on until it lapped the walls of the old house, mounting to a height of nine feet.

Many of the villagers had sought refuge in the upper stories; and in a room that commanded a wide view of the valley, stood Howarth, surveying the strange scene. The floods had spread as far as the eye could reach; cottages had collapsed, buildings washed away, and here and there the carcase of a cow or a horse was carried swiftly past on the current. Anna stood by his side.

"Do you know," he said, "there is a tradition in my family that the first Howarth to enter Combe Dayrell Manor at the request of its head, would become master of the place before the year was out?"

"A fig for your traditions," she answered simply, "we have long ago cried a truce on them. More practical interests must occupy my thoughts. This flood has been most disastrous to me."

"Yet it has gained me much," he said, "it has brought me closer to you than ever before; and say what you will about traditions, my belief in them is unshaken."

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

The desolate dreariness of winter was broken at last; the fragrant freshness of Spring had matured into the leafy radiance of Summer. The floods had resulted in serious losses to the dwellers in the Avon Valley; hardly a family but had experienced some loss, either of stock or of property, but the toll of human life had been relatively small, only four persons having perished in the inundation.

Anna's losses had been very high. Situated as the Manor farm was in a loop of the river, the full force of the flood had swept over it, destroying some valuable stock, ruining much acreage, and making impossible of repair many items of farm machinery. It had been a particularly unfortunate happening in the light of her efforts to reorganize the place, as it had set her back considerably and nullified much hard work.

Robert Haviland had been prostrated at the failure of his scheme of erecting a dam against the flood. The circumstance preyed upon his mind. He felt he had been the innocent cause of lost lives and property. He had aged by twenty years since last we saw him. His face seemed paler, his hair greyer, and his shoulders to stoop with the weight of some intolerable burden.

With a heavy heart, Anna welcomed him to the Manor.

"Let us go outside," she said, "it is uncomfortably hot here."

They passed into the terracing of the old English garden. Not a breath of air was stirring and an ominous silence hung around everything. Flashes of summer lightning throbbed in the heavens.

"There is thunder about," remarked Haviland casually.

"Ay," she replied fiercely. "and lightnings and storms, and blizzards, and earthquakes and eruptions! Oh! What am I saying? I feel something in my brain will snap."

She rested her arms upon an ornamental stone urn, and as a tear coursed down her cheek, her companion was instantly at her side.

"Anna," he said, "what is troubling you?"

Like a flash came the answer:

"This morning John Howarth asked me to become his wife."

For a moment the Rector stood as though petrified. When he spoke his voice was low and hollow.

"And you consented."

"No; I have another twenty-four hours to decide."

"But you will accept him. God will require that much of you. He will be greatly glorified by your so doing."

She turned upon him savagely.

"I have tried to think like that, but cannot. Surely God wouldn't make a creature miserable, rob it of all that it holds dearest in life and condemn it to perform an act which it loathes."

"Remember the greater the work the greater the sacrifice demanded to fulfil it. 'God moves in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform' and this conversion of our neighbor is a wonder indeed. Be assured my child, God will not forget this thing you are doing for him."

"If I could share your confidence! But I cannot. My whole being rebels against the giving up of myself to Howarth, when my heart is in the keeping of another."

The man winced as though someone had stabbed him. He pondered for a moment, before drawing himself to his full height.

"Who are we," he began slowly, "to attempt to thwart the Almighty with our petty loves, to allow personal prejudices and personal aspirations to balk the Divine Will?"

Anna stood confronting him. Her features faintly mirrored the tumult that was raging within her breast.

"Please; please," she spoke passionately, "tell me the truth; tell me—you do not care!"

"My dear child; pray be calm!"

"Calm!" she laughed almost hysterically "what of calmness will there be for me; as well bid the sea to remain still. The truth may be hard to bear, but infinitely worse is a veiled lie."

Haviland flushed; his first impulse was to scold the girl's temerity, but at the last he changed his mind.

"Come; come Anna," he said coaxingly, "do try to look at this thing in its right perspective. Howarth has need of you—more than any other man I know. Your influence over him I fully believe to be an instrument of the Divine Will. Maybe, I am making a sacrifice in this matter, equalled only by your own. Knowledge of that should help you, as will my constant thoughts and prayers."

"Dear Robert," she answered him calmly, "it may be wrong in the eyes of God; it may be unwomanly in the eyes of man, but I must tell you that though I may become the wife of John Howarth, my heart can never be his. It is, as it has always been, and I believe, always will be—yours!"

He passed a hand over his brow, from which great beads of sweat hung. It was plain to see he was suffering agonies of mind.

"Time," he said, "time heals all wounds. You and I have a difficult path before us, but we shall triumph. The Lord will not despise us for doing His will. I am

ready to place my trust in His hands; will you not do likewise?"

"Goodbye!" she said.

The man looked down at her. All the love that he had ever felt for her swelled up within him; fiercely he caught her in his arms, and she did not resist. He kissed her brow and released her, and she was gone—  
for ever.

For ever!—no sentence of death could plunge a soul into deeper gloom—Haviland returned to his rectory, crushed and defeated.

Early on the following morning Anna walked over to Braxendale Wood. A nightingale was singing in the branches of an elm. The girl could detect the plaintive piping of the bird, the passionate yearning the notes expressed, and as she listened to the wondrous sounds she was deeply moved. Suddenly there came a distinct answering call, and a song the beauty of which paled the most tuneful melodies of the masters. To the girl it seemed a seraphic hand thrummed, as on a harp, her heart strings, awakening slumbering fires that burned dully in her soul—and all that she knew or had felt of love found expression in that song of wondrous beauty. Suddenly, as suddenly as it had begun, the song closed, and on its cessation a feeling of dreary desolation encompassed her.

Through the thick belt of trees the amber light of morning was chasing the violet and amethyst shadows adown the valley; the ruined priory by Staverton wore a crown of gold. A rustle in the undergrowth told her she was not alone, and looking up, with a little startled cry, she recognized Howarth standing near.

"I am not alone in being scorned by Morpheus," he said.

"On the contrary, Morpheus has been scorned that Philomel might be homaged."

"Philomel is scarcely likely to summon you again," he replied, "I heard the male bird's song and know that when he sings thus, it is his last."

"The expression was almost human. In fact, few humans feel half so intensely as did that fluffy little handful of feathers."

Howarth moved over to the elm, and stooping low searched among the bracken. When he returned he held the lifeless body of the songster, still warm, in the palm of his hand.

"Ornithologists tell us the poor creature has broken the chords of its throat in a vain attempt to surpass itself, but you and I will prefer the popular belief that the bird died of a broken heart, as, the mating season being over, its mate had rejected it. These same ornithologists declare the birds sing only when the females are hatching their broods—but we are witnesses to the contrary."

Anna took up the poor lifeless body and pressed it to her lips; a bright tear fell among its feathers.

"Shall we give it a decent burial?" she asked.

He scooped at the base of the tree and tenderly laying the silent songster among green leaves, he covered it with earth.

Together they left the wood.

"Do you know Braxendale Wood has a peculiar attraction for me?" said the man.

"Why?"

"In the days of the Conventicle Act it was a crime for any five persons to hold a religious meeting other than of the established church, and Braxendale Wood was one of those places where the Separatists used to secretly assemble and worship according to their consciences."



"Yet had you been alive in those days I half believe you would have been on the side of the persecutors."

"There you do me an injustice. I have been a life-long champion of freedom."

"For yourself!" she laughed, "but surely that is the stream yonder where Aeolus and myself got our ducking? What happened to the old Mill?"

"It toppled into the race the same night." He pointed to the stout Saxon pillars and arches of a former structure which were practically intact whilst the Jacobean brick and oak above them had collapsed.

The water sped past the idle wheel suspended in the air under its pent roof, broadening beyond into a shallow gravelly bay in which trout leaped to greet the awakening day. A swallow looped through the broad arch breaking the crystal surface with its downy breast,

His hand closed slowly over hers as it lay on the parapet of the mill wall; he sought her eyes eagerly.

She looked up quickly.

".....a wild thing taken in a trap,  
That sees the trapper coming through the wood."

"Your answer?" he said in an awed whisper.

"It is--'yes' " she answered simply.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

To say that the announcement of Anna's coming marriage to the Wichenden quarryowner created a sensation in the Avon Valley, is putting the matter very mildly.

Folks who knew of the former state of affairs between the two houses looked upon the proposed union with astonishment. The ancient ones who had known the Boulton male line said the thing was the work of the devil—and that no good could come of it.

Mrs. Elkes, the Vicar's wife, acclaimed Anna's action as the sequel to her theory of instability.

Anna had become extremely popular as mistress of Combe Dayrell Manor, but it was doubtful whether she could retain that popularity as the wife of John Howarth. Despite his recent reforms, the quarryowner was still anything but loved in the valley; the memories of the people were too long for any sudden change of feeling towards him.

Up at the Manor, an epidemic of desertions had occurred. Elspeth had left in anger, vowing never to serve the wife of a Howarth, and with her had gone a goodly portion of the domestic staff. Ruth Dimblebee alone remained staunch to her mistress. The changed attitude of the countryfolk hurt Anna grievously; but it did not deter her from going about the arrangements for her marriage on the second Sunday in November, firmly and quietly. This Sunday fell upon the twelfth of the month, one day after Martinmas, a festival rubricated in the Kingsnorton calendar from time immemorial. Merchants and corn chandlers from far and near attended the sales in the corn exchange; horse buyers, the horse fair; and pleasure seekers the show-

grounds. At the latter place merry-go-rounds had churned their mournful tunes; leather-lunged, shiny-hatted fellows had exhorted all and sundry to "step up!"; sword-swallowers had disposed of enough weapons to equip an entire cavalry corps; clowns had set their string of sausages barking at the crack of a dog-whip; performing dogs had been put through their tricks until they were bored stiff and eyed the gaping crowds with positive contempt; whilst on the barebacks of aged steeds, circus girls had pirouettéd nattily if not as brilliantly as the canvas outside depicted them.

Between the usual tawdry shows and booths, the crowds had shuffled goodhumoredly all day, and now that the naphtha flares had added their garish light the scene was complete.

On the fringe of the fair a crowd had gathered about a stall. Through the crowd, Ruth Dimblebee elbowed her way, grasping her sweetheart, Andrew Devitt by the arm and attempting to get him away. Andrew had been having a merry time, sampling the fun of the fair, and to judge by his general unsteadiness sampling strong ale or stronger spirits. Ruth found him trying to pitch a celluloid ball into the mouth of a goldfish bowl, a feat which even from a nine-foot distance was almost impossible. The goldfish swam around unconcernedly; they were inured to rustic gullibility.

"Another shillingsworth o' pitches, mother," called Andrew to the benefi-ciare.

Ruth protested to the show-woman. "Thee'st a fine one to rob a poor drunken man o' his coin." Others in the crowd took Ruth's part, and as Andrew's final pitch hit the bowl's narrow rim and bounced off harmlessly, the show-woman took from a box a large white bone-handled clasp knife and handed it to the ploughman. "There tak' this an' be off!" she said.

Andrew accepted the gift with great glee.

"Now do ee' come hwome, for the Lord's sake," said Ruth.

But the attractions of the fair proved too much for Andrew, he paused continually before some catch-penny stall and Ruth wearied of her task. Slyly she emptied her lover's pockets and left him to his own resources.

Andrew had not been free many moments when he felt a tug at his sleeve, and turning found Jo, the Combe Dayrell gipsy by his side.

Andrew's drunken eyes leered.

"'Tis precious little they do give a body here—'tis pay, pay, pay!"

"Ay; but thee'st got it to pay. I did see thee sell half a score beast to Merry Magner—'twas a hard bargain thee drove."

Andrew slapped his pocket gleefully, thinking the proceeds of that sale still rested there. The gipsy's eyes watched each movement greedily. They passed a drinking booth, and prostrating himself on his stomach, the gipsy disappeared under the flap of the tent, emerging presently with a bottle of whisky.

Andrew gave a whoop of glee. "'Tis a full quart," he giggled, "Lord! but thees't clever." He clutched gluttonously at the bottle.

"No." said his companion, "we mun get away from this y-here place, afore we-m caught! Thee shall drink on th' high road."

They left the fair ground together, and entering the fields, Jo permitted his companion to drink. Journeying on they reached Braxendale Wood shortly before ten o'clock. Here Andrew refused to go further, and when Jo produced another quart of whisky from some unknown source, the ploughman sat down and drank. Jo meanwhile amused himself by making rabbit "gins," of twigs and looped cord.

The liquor was a long while in having the desired effect on Andrew, and Jo, searching among his pockets, began constructing pheasant snares. Taking a soaked pea, he split it to accommodate a long horsehair. This serves to choke the bird as it swallows the pea, and the method, being swift and silent, is in favour with poachers of the West Country. When he had so treated the peas he began scattering them at the foot of the trees. In doing so he scared a pheasant that woke the silent night with its startled cries.

Cursing heartily, he returned to Andrew. The ploughman had drained the bottle dry, and lay upon his back, insensible. Jo looked upon the degrading spectacle delightedly. Dealing the fallen man a hearty kick he rolled him onto his back and searched the pocket Andrew had imagined carried his money. He found nothing but the bone-handled knife. He slipped this in his pocket and began a systematic search of the body. But it yielded not a penny, and in his angry disappointment, he fell to pummeling the prostrate form and to deal it a series of lusty kicks.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

The eve of her marriage, Anna spent in as sane and practical a fashion as she would were she preparing for the sale of her estates. She went about the arrangements coldly and deliberately and when they were completed, sought her couch, tired of body.

But the sleep that she wooed would not come; try as she would to prevent them, sinister thoughts worried her; fears that she had hitherto succeeded in suppressing, pressed in upon her, and springing from her bed she hastily dressed and crossed the fields to Queckett Rectory.

The door of Robert Haviland's room stood ajar, and her heart thumped wildly as, like a guilty thing she crossed the threshold.

All around lay evidence of the Rector's late occupation—the open blotter, his seal, his watch, his gloves, and his hat. These ordinary things had the power to thrill her, snatching them up she hugged them with a fiendish joy. A sheet of manuscript lay on the table. Without the least compunction she read:—

"Be merciful unto me, O God! Be merciful. Listen well to the voice of my supplication. For I have done Thee a wrong thing: even as Thy servant, Moses did in the wilderness. In the hour of my conceit I took to me a graven image. I did look upon it, and it was fair. In lustre it outshone the stars; in brightness the sun; the moon's sweetness was as vinegar and gall. It was more graceful than the fawn; more tender than the lamb; more loving than the dove. Its scent was more grateful than the violet's; its song outjoyed the lark; its form was slender as the reed, pliant as

"the willow. Its countenance was radiant as the dawn; its brows pencilled arches on clear alabaster; its eyes deep pools of liquid fire; its mouth a coralled bow; its head crowned with a halo of gold—and it had a woman's heart. I said it is fair, it is lovely, I will worship it to the neglect of my God. But Thou hast been pleased to punish my conceit—Thou hast given her to another. O God! be merciful and give me strength to do Thy will."

As Anna replaced the manuscript she grasped a chair for support. "Strength! Strength!" Haviland was praying for strength. She found him prostrated before the altar in the cold little church still praying—and for strength! Should she, obeying the commands of her love, break in upon his devotions, and throw in her weight against his prayers? Strength! strength! What a mockery it seemed to pray for strength to crush a creature soul; strength to combat the love for which she hungered! Sick at heart, she retraced her steps to the Manor, rebellious against the fate that had dealt her such a hard part.

\* \* \*

Over at Wichenden Lodge, John Howarth stood in the dining room. The long table was set with a snowy cloth; all the best silver in the house had been pressed into service; decanters and flagons graced the sideboards; chairs were placed in position for the guests—everything, in fact, was ready for the wedding breakfast.

The servants had all retired for the night and he was left alone downstairs.

He looked at the clock—it wanted half-an-hour to ten. How the moments dragged! Restlessly he paced the room, taking in every detail of the arrangements. Satisfied, he turned to the fire and with an arm resting on the mantelpiece, he pondered on the coming event.

He had won! By the time the clock had completed another cycle, Anna would be his! The thought roused his passion. He saw her in her varying moods:—joyously carefree on the ice; piteous as he rescued her from the millrace; strongly masterful on the night of the trial; and fluttering like a frightened bird when he claimed her at the Old Mill. These and other incidents he had stored in his brain as a Catholic stores his sacred relics; his worship of them was equally fervid. The thought of possession increased his impatience a thousandfold. Backwards and forwards he paced like one demented.

He began thinking of all the things that could rob him of his hard won prize—sickness, disaster, death. On the rack of a hundred doubts he suffered agonies. In his anguish he called on Heaven to assist him; hitherto an unbeliever, he did not deny Heaven's authority in this matter and vowed in return for the successful accomplishment of the marriage he would devote his remaining days to the practise of good works.

Throwing on a greatcoat he left the Lodge. Inaction in his present frame of mind was galling; even an aimless wander through the moon-flooded valley would afford relief. Leaving the highroad, he stopped to count ten sonorous strokes of Wichenden church clock.

By Braxendale Wood the shriek of a pheasant warned him of the presence of poachers, and although it was against his natural inclination, he did not break his journey to interfere. But on passing the south-east corner of the wood he saw between the trees a human figure, bending over a prostrate form. Fearing foul play, he crossed over to the wood and keeping in the shadows cast by the trees, saw the Openmarsh gipsy, Jo, belaboring the fallen one heartily.

Howarth stepped forward to put an end to the outrage. He seized the gipsy by the collar and slipping



off his broad leather belt, laid it upon the tawny one's back so effectually as to make him scream for mercy.

Howarth loosened his hold.

"You vagabond!" he said, "so you are adding highway robbery to your record of crime, eh?"

He would have renewed the chastisement, but the gipsy rolled over in the bracken and made off. After a glance at the drunken ploughman, Howarth retraced his steps. The moon threw traceried shadows across his path, and he had almost passed into the open again when something sprang from the branches above—a clinging fiendish something that settled on his shoulders and forced him to his knees. With a tremendous effort he attempted to throw off the clinging thing, but a sharp pain between the shoulders caused him to stagger, lose his balance and fall forward on his face.

\* \* \*

Early on her bridal morning, Anna was hastily summoned to Wichenden Lodge. A gamekeeper on Howarth's estate had found his master lying on the fringe of Braxendale Wood scarcely conscious. He had revived somewhat on being removed to his home, and had expressed a desire to see Anna.

She found him lying in a downstairs room on a sofa. Knowing that their skill could not save him he had dismissed Dr. Earnshaw and the surgeon who had arrived with the police from Kingsnorton.

"What does it matter," he had said to the medicos, "the most you can do is to prolong my agony by a few hours, and I shall not thank you for that."

To the enquiries of the police officers he had replied: "Everything points to that poor fool of a ploughman having done this thing; it was his knife, and he lay alongside me all night in the wood. Were the case not so black against him, I would leave you to find

out for yourselves the real culprit. As it is I have no option but to tell you that the Openmarsh gipsy is responsible."

Anna sat by the sofa. The veiled warnings of the doctors had not prepared her for the shock which awaited her.

She recoiled half afraid.

"Am I repulsive?" he asked bitterly.

"No; but I was not prepared for this. I had imagined you were hurt slightly. But, but——"

"Yes; I know I am doomed. The gipsy's knife went deep, and the thrusts must have killed a less tougher man. But I have been thinking of many things whilst lying here; come nearer; I need you; let me take your hand; it will help to guide me on this journey I am about to take."

She yielded her hand to him as he searched feebly about the coverlet, he had permitted them to place over him.

She drew closer; a wave of tenderness swept over her as she noted the suffering in the man's face. Slipping to her knees she raised his head on her arm and pressed her lips to his fevered brow. A bright, crystal tear trembled on her eyelash a moment, and fell on the coverlet.

The wounded man noted it.

"You pity me," he said, "you pity my suffering; but I would rather you pitied my foolishness. I have learned that:

"That which ye sow, ye reap. . . .

The sesamum was sesamum, the corn was corn.

The Silence and the Darkness knew."

I have been a poor fool, who in the conceit of his strength dared to pit his will against the Almighty's. A

week ago I was an arrogant defier of God, denying Him any authority over my actions; you see what I am now, my punishment is complete."

After a pause, he continued:

"You once said that I was selfish. You were the first to tell me that, although the countryfolk must have held such an opinion long enough. You were right. All my life, self has been placed first. What talents Heaven has given me have been used for my own selfish purposes. Selfishness prompted me to take an interest in you; it formed the integral part of those original unworthy motives of which I shall forever stand condemned in your eyes."

"No; no;" she pleaded, "I shall always think of you as I have known you these last months—as just and as honest a man as any in this countryside."

The steely look in his eye softened; beneath their leaden hue a brightness seemed to diffuse his features.

"Anna," he whispered, "when I first knew my wound to be mortal, what think you, did I most regret? That I would never more rejoice at the bursting of Spring's first bud? nor feel the quiver of a mettlesome horse between my knees? nor see the sun set red over the Marsh hill? nor hear the pattering of summer rain in Braxendale Wood?"

Again he paused for breath. His head shifted wearily. Conversation was taxing his strength, but he was determined not to surrender until he had finished.

"No;" he continued, "the thought of leaving you, of never more hearing your voice, nor feeling the touch of your hand, drove me to distraction. For a moment I felt strong enough to defy even Death; I loved you—oh! so fiercely. But I am calmer now. Whilst I have

lain here, my eyes have been opened. I now know that when we buried the little songster at the foot of the elm, with it was buried your hope of happiness. I want that to be changed. I want you to seek out the man you love and cherish him as it would never have fallen to my lot to be cherished."

She moistened his parched lips from a glass the doctors had placed by his side. Revived he continued:

"Anna; just now you seem peculiarly mine. Whilst you are here I am happy. But I am sinking fast; I feel on the edge of a precipice with no power to prevent my falling. My end is near; I have need of your prayers; pray for me and read from The Book that I have despised. I want to complete my happiness by making my peace with Him!"

Anna read chapter after chapter at his bidding, and as she read, the dying quarryowner lay back, his eyes closed in rapture. Who shall say what was being revealed to this man—this strange repentant who had been so haughty and so meek; so selfish and so generous; this man whom a woman's hand was leading to the Throne of Grace?

Presently he roused himself. His companion bent over him to catch the last words he was uttering quietly as though to himself, in the dialect of the Avon Valley. With a great wearied sigh he fell back limply. "Oh! God!" he said, "my 'tarnal soul be tired!"

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

The sun came with a dying spurt and shot a bright ray across to where they laid the slain quarryowner to his last long rest in Wichenden churchyard.

As the vergers lowered their burden to the grave, the tolling bell ceased as some evilly-disposed person climbed the tower and cut the ropes. The white robed priest consigned the broken body to mother earth and offered up a prayer for the repose of the man's soul, "that after a tempestuous life the Lord may be pleased to let him rest with the peace of one who has wrapped the drapery of his couch about him and says 'I will lay me down to pleasant dreams.'"

A storm of groans and cat-calls greeted the words. The villagers had attended in full force to mock the dead. What sympathy they had, had been expended on the gipsy who lay under arrest for the crime. Amid the din and confusion, Anna stepped from among the mourners. She bore a cross of purple hyacinths and placed it on the coffin. Then plucking a blossom from the wreath she pressed it to her lips. The villagers hissed her actions, but she did not heed them, and when the frosted clouds began to fall into the open grave, Robert Haviland led her away.

When they reached the Manor, Anna turned fiercely upon him. The smart of the insults at the graveside was still upon her.

\*Cutting the bellropes—A popular superstition in the West Country is that to cut the bellropes at a funeral, prevents the departed soul from reaching heaven.

"Do you know," she said, "I hate England and the English. Your much-vaunted freedom, your boasted cult of brotherhood are empty shams. You are corrupted with the legacy of centuries of prejudice and deceit; in your heart of hearts you are as tyrannical as in the days of feudal lord and monk; your standards of values are warped; your judgments biased by pride and tradition. The very voluptuous beauty of your lands is a snare and a pitfall. I hate you! I hate you!"

He moved over to a window and waited. The tragic events of the past days had had their effect upon her nerves. He noted with satisfaction that the tears began to course down her cheeks.

Presently she crossed over to him.

"Forgive me, Robert," she said simply. "I am ungrateful, for here I have found what I prize most in life—You!"

He took her unresisting in his arms.

"Anna," he said, "I prize you, too and will prize you all my life. The sense of your value to me is here, in my heart. But let us remember God's part in this matter. He has ordained our union, and to Him we must consecrate our lives. Only when it is founded on such a Rock can love defy the tempestuous storms of this Troubled Valley!"

THE END.

